

## Capehart-Sponsored Legislation to Honor Fallen V.I. Officers Gains Unanimous Support

**Bill 35-0253, introduced by Senator Diane Capehart, seeks to memorialize 17 fallen law enforcement officers with signage and plaques, as committee members praise the measure as a noble tribute to their service and sacrifice.**

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Legislation proposed by Senator Diane Capehart to recognize and honor enforcement officers who lost their lives in the line of duty received overwhelming support from members of the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection on Tuesday.

Bill 35-0253 authorizes the sum of \$12,000 to erect memorial signage at police stations across the territory. Additionally, plaques in honor of each officer will be given to their respective families,

if the bill becomes law. Seventeen deceased enforcement officers are expected to be memorialized through the bill.

VIPD Asst. Commissioner Sidney Elskoe told lawmakers that the bill “reflects a profound recognition of the commitment, dedication and sacrifice that law enforcement officers provide to our communities.” The sacrifices made by peace officers “remind us of the inherent dangers of law enforcement and the unwavering commitment these individuals had to their duty,” added Mr. Elskoe.

He described the fallen officers as “pillars of strength, courage and commitment to service.” For Mr. Elskoe, “their sacrifices leave a legacy that deserves to be memorialized and serves as an inspiration to current and future generations of law enforcement officers.” The assistant commissioner was confident that passing Bill 35-0253 into law would “affirm our commitment to upholding the values they live by, and to ensure their bravery and sacrifices are never forgotten.”

“We do it with no fear and no regrets, and at the end of the day we don't know if we're coming home,” shared Steven Phillip, Chief of Police for the St. Thomas/St. John district. “Every time I put on this uniform, I have to tell my loved ones I love them because I don't know what will happen.”

The bill received favorable feedback from committee members, with Senator Milton Potter describing it as “a respectable and decent thing to do.” Senator Ray Fonseca, the son of a police officer, said “this is a very easy bill to support because it's for a noble cause.” Meanwhile, Senator Dwayne DeGraff, himself a former law enforcement officer, suggested erecting a physical monument upon which the names of fallen officers could be permanently etched.

Senators Milton Potter and Alma Francis Heyliger both signaled their intention to introduce legislation aimed at supporting the families of fallen police officers, including providing insurance and other monetary benefits for close family members up to 26 years of age and amending the V.I Code to make annuity payments more balanced and fair.

Committee chair Senator Carla Joseph, meanwhile, was buoyed by news to offer more support for those who lost loved ones. “How do we look at providing service now for the families who are left to survive? What supports are there in place, from the police department and the Government of the Virgin Islands?” she wondered. She suggested that VIPD consider providing families with something tangible to remember the deceased.

The seventeen officers to be memorialized through Bill 35-0253 are:

1. Police Detective Delberth Phipps, Jr.
2. Police Officer Colvin Terrance 11 Georges, Sr.
3. Police Officer Aaron Hodge
4. Police Officer Akeem Basil “Teddy” Newton
5. Police Officer Ariel Anton Frett
6. Police Officer Cuthbert Ezekiel Chapman
7. Police Officer Steven Alexis Hodge
8. Police Officer Dexter L. Mardenborough
9. Police Officer Richard Nicolas Callwood
10. Patrolman Wilbur Horatio Francis
11. Patrolman Patrick Emmanuel Sweeney
12. Patrolman Allan Williams

13. Patrolman Rudel Albert Parrott
14. Patrolman Leroy Alvaro Swan
15. Patrolman Leopold Emanuel Fredericks, Jr.,
16. Patrolman Lionel Emanuel Isaac
17. Deputy Marshall Randy Arnoldo Stephens

The bill will now be considered before the Committee of Rules and Judiciary, chaired by the bill's sponsor, Senator Capehart. "This legislation is to acknowledge all of them who have put their time and their energies into protecting us," she reminded her colleagues.

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