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Governor Takes Action on Five Bills, Vetoes Emergency Funding Restrictions and Derelict Vehicles Legislation; Frett-Gregory Calls for Override

Senator Donna Frett-Gregory opposes vetoes on derelict vehicles enforcement and emergency fund oversight, urging her colleagues to reinstate critical measures

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Acting Governor Tregenza Roach, on behalf of Governor Albert Bryan Jr., addressed five bills passed by the 35th Legislature, issuing approvals, partial approvals, and vetoes. His decisions, communicated to Senate President Novelle E. Francis Jr. in a letter dated December 2, include recommendations for amendments, justifications for vetoes, and acknowledgments of legislative efforts.

The acting governor approved Bill No. 35-0205, which allocates \$900,000 to the Department of Sports, Parks, and Recreation for constructing an equestrian training facility in Estate Body Slob, St. Croix. Additionally, Bill No. 35-0271, aimed at improving student and pedestrian safety, was approved. This bill introduces school speed zones, signage, and enforcement measures. However, the governor suggested amendments to enhance these laws, including broadening enforcement authority beyond the V.I. Police Department and involving the Department of Public Works in road determinations.

Also signed into law was Bill No. 35-0402, which extends the statute of limitations for filing civil actions involving childhood sexual abuse. While supporting the bill's intent, he urged legislators to revisit the measure to address potential due process challenges, suggesting a retroactivity period of 10 years and clearer definitions of terms such as "abuse," "exploitation," and "enablers."

The acting governor vetoed Bill No. 35-0403, which sought to amend laws governing abandoned and derelict motor vehicles. Governor Bryan cited the adequacy of existing laws and the strain additional duties would place on the VIPD. He noted that abandoned vehicle management is currently handled by island administrators under the Office of the Governor, with VIPD assistance when necessary. He expressed concerns about insufficient resources and the costs associated with enforcement, such as towing fees (\$150) and detox fees (\$300 per vehicle).

For Bill No. 35-0412, Mr. Roach exercised his line-item veto authority to strike two sections. Section 3, which the administration claims would have restricted the governor's ability to respond to emergencies, was vetoed as Mr. Bryan deemed such restrictions arbitrary. Section 9, reallocating University of the Virgin Islands funds to the Economic Development Authority (EDA) for grants to farmers and fishers, was also vetoed. Governor Bryan argued that the move would harm UVI's aquaculture programs and noted that the EDA already has funding to support these groups.

Senator Donna Frett-Gregory, sponsor of the derelict vehicle legislation, expressed strong opposition to the governor's veto, labeling it a misunderstanding of the current law. She argued that the existing agreement between the VIPD and island administrators is insufficient to address the growing issue of abandoned vehicles in the territory.

"I saw his veto message this evening, and it just says to me that there is some disconnect between what's happening in the governor's office and how they've been reading the current law," Frett-Gregory told the Consortium Tuesday night. "His veto message speaks specifically about the island administrator. But that is, in fact, a gentleman's agreement; the law does not require the island administrator to carry out these duties. It's a gentleman's agreement between the Office of the Governor and the Police Department."

Frett-Gregory intends to seek an override of the veto, citing the public frustration with recurring vehicle abandonment. "I'm hard pressed to believe that as the chief executive of this territory, he does not see the immediate need to address the challenges that we have with abandoned vehicles in the Virgin Islands," she said.

The senator also criticized Mr. Bryan's line-item veto of funds for emergency purposes, asserting that the Senate intended to restrict the use of certain federal funds unless

approved by the Legislature. She noted that allowing unrestricted spending undermines accountability and has led to poor tangible outcomes for residents.

"They cannot take this money and spend it as he pleases. He's of the opinion that he can do that," she said, referring to funding received by the territory that's not generated by taxes, such as [the Epstein windfall](#). "I'm going to move to override," she added, contending that Mr. Bryan must seek approval for such funds from the Senate.

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