

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Senate Committee Approves Bill to Raise Traffic Fines, Establish VIPD Impound Lot

Bill 36-0036 proposes a minimum \$100 fine for traffic violations and includes a \$150 towing fee and other charges to fund the V.I. Police Department's impound lot. The bill received full support from VIPD and six committee members.

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Legislation which would increase penalties for traffic violations and establish the V.I. Police Department Impound Lot was approved by the Committee on Homeland Security, Justice, and Public Safety on Thursday.

The bill, sponsored by Senator Kenneth Gittens, was first introduced in the 35th Legislature but was [held in Committee in December 2024](#) after VIPD representatives failed to attend the meeting under the mistaken belief that it had been canceled. Their absence, however, did not prevent most lawmakers from supporting the bill, then referred to as Bill 35-0417.

On Thursday, Gittens reintroduced the proposed legislation, now called Bill 35-0036. "The need for this bill arises from the fact that the fine schedule in the traffic code has not been updated in many years," he Gittens stated. According to the lawmaker, roadways have become "more congested and traffic violations have evolved" while "penalties for such violations have not kept pace with inflation or the seriousness of the offenses."

Under the proposed legislation, "no citation would be less than \$100, and the distribution of fines will also benefit various sectors of our community," Gittens explained. From each citation paid, the legislation will appropriate \$1 to the Superior Court for administrative purposes, \$2 for the Rising Stars Steel Orchestra, \$2 to the issuing law enforcement agency, \$5 to support the Police Athletic League's programming, and \$25 for the maintenance and upkeep of the newly proposed police impound lot.

According to Gittens, establishing an impound lot will "ensure that abandoned vehicles are removed promptly and that public safety is prioritized." The bill outlines an initial fee schedule, subject to review by the commissioner of V.I. Police Department. The original proposal suggested \$65 for towing services, \$35 for daily storage and \$25 for administrative processing. However, an amendment to the bill will increase the towing charge to \$150, making it "commensurate [with] the going rate."

This time, VIPD was on hand to express their "unequivocal support for Bill 36-0036." According to Police Commissioner Mario Brooks, "the urgency of this bill is underscored by the recent data from the V.I. Office of Highway Safety regarding traffic citations." Data has revealed a "troubling rise in violations," which the VIPD believes "can be linked to the current fee structure."

In FY2023, the VIPD issued 6276 moving citations and 875 parking violations. In FY2024, they issued 7294 moving citations and 1216 parking violations. "The increase clearly shows that despite having penalties in place, there are those who continue to operate motor vehicles with wanton disregard across our territory," Brooks observed. Now, VIPD hopes that increasing fines to "prohibitive levels" will "protect all road users."

VIPD is equally enthusiastic about the establishment of an impound lot, having recently acquired two vehicles with towing capabilities and has already identified spaces in each territory... VIPD has already "begun to work on preparing both locations for service," the commissioner noted.

Bill 36-0036 also received backing from Attorney General Gordon Rhea. "The increase in many of the traffic fines should serve as a deterrent to violations of our traffic laws," he remarked. He lauded the establishment of an impound lot and made particular references to instances where vehicles are impounded as evidence of a crime. "Allowing the vehicle to remain outdoors and unsecured allows for evidence to be tampered with or removed from police custody. Mr. Rhea described the associated fees as "reasonable and justifiable."

Just as when it was initially presented before the committee, lawmakers greenlit Mr. Gittens' bill. Senator Dwayne DeGraff indicated his intention to sign on as a co-sponsor.

While Senator Angel Bolques Jr. supported the proposed legislation, he wondered about the rate of compliance with the new fee structure. "Even though we may raise, particularly individuals may still not pay," he noted. Brooks, however, was adamant that "those fees have been stagnant at that rate, I think it's high time that we raise those fees."

"The fines are so low that people just prefer to just take the fine and move on, not changing their behaviors," added Arthur Joseph, commander of the Traffic Investigations Bureau. Mr. Joseph also reminded lawmakers that "we just can't make people believe that updated fines are the end of it. We must couple that with education." VIPD intends to continue regular campaigns to remind the motoring public of laws guiding the use of public roadways.

"Law enforcement agencies must remain vigilant in their efforts, and the attention to detail from our justice and judicial systems will be critical in ensuring that this law is implemented properly and equitably," advised Senator Gittens.

Sufficiently satisfied that increasing fines and establishing an impound lot will bode well for the territory, the six committee members in attendance all voted in favor of Bill 36-0036. It will be considered once more in an upcoming meeting of the Senate Committee on Rules and Judiciary.