

logo not found or type unknown

VI Legislature Honors James Sasso for 17 Years of Funeral Service Marked by Dignity, Empathy, and Compassion

After 17 years as a funeral director and nearly 40 years as an electrician, James Sasso was honored by the Senate for his service to the USVI, his advocacy for dignified burial practices, and his call for youth mentorship and trade education programs.

Senate / **Published On May 21, 2025 06:44 AM /**

Nelcia Charlemagne **May 21, 2025**

Image not found or type unknown



James Sasso. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

After seventeen years of distinguished service in the mortuary and funeral service industry, James Sasso, funeral director at Turnbull's Funeral Home on St. Thomas, is being lauded by the 36th Legislature for his work.

On Tuesday, Mr. Sasso and a bevy of supporters appeared before the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection to testify on Bill 36-0007. By Mr. Sasso's own admission, he had delayed the hearing of the bill for over a year. "I kept putting off this bill, saying I don't want no recognition. I'm just doing my community service and the Lord will thank me," he told lawmakers. Nonetheless, he gave in after being convinced by several senators who encouraged him to accept his accolades while still alive to receive them.

Born in Anguilla, Mr. Sasso eventually moved to St. Thomas, where he started a family and worked as an electrician for over thirty-eight years. A desire to serve the community differently prompted his transition to funeral services. "I enjoy being a funeral director more because I bring comfort to families that are grieving," he explained. Indeed, Mr. Sasso's contributions as a funeral director — navigating practicalities during one of life's most emotionally turbulent moments — are well known in the community.

"The story of how Mr. Sasso treats the dead needs to be recorded in the annals of the Virgin Islands," remarked Bernice Turnbull. She described the honoree as "humble, caring, considerate and empathetic." She and other testifiers described his professional demeanor during funerals, and the respectable flair of his well-known march. "I salute the 36th Legislature for honoring the dead by honoring Mr. Sasso for the loving care and empathic way he treats the dead," Ms. Turnbull said.

"Through him, we see what it means to transform duty into purpose and compassion into legacy," said Dr. Kyza Callwood on Mr. Sasso's career. "The manner in which we honor the departed shapes the way we carry forward, and individuals like Mr. Sasso are guardians of that sacred transition."

Glowing remarks were also shared by Mr. Sasso's nephew, Jelani Sasso, who followed in his uncle's footsteps. "James has woven himself into the fabric of the islands. His respect for traditions, his deep connection to the people and his ability to bring comfort in times of sorrow have made him a trusted figure," said the younger Mr. Sasso. "His work has not only honored those who have passed but has also uplifted the living, reminding us of the power of compassion."

Senator Angel Bolques Jr., who sponsored the legislation, told those gathered that "this is more than just a tribute to one man. It's a recognition of a sacred profession; one that demonstrates and demands strength, patience, resilience, professionalism and an extraordinary capacity for compassion and care." The lawmaker earned the support of his colleagues, who joined in thanking Mr. Sasso for his work.

"I too am one of those individuals over the years who have been thoroughly impressed by Mr. Sasso's service that he provides to the community," said Senator Alma Francis Heyliger. The lawmaker was interested in listening to Mr. Sasso's perspective on how the deceased could be treated with more dignity in the face of dwindling amounts of physical space available to inter the deceased.

"For many years I've been asking for Western Cemetery to have the walkways fixed, and Eastern Cemetery is continuing without a plan... East is up a hill, and we've already started burying on top of each other, so you have to be walking on other people's tomb to get into the burial site," Mr. Sasso lamented. The funeral director also advocated for the expansion of his industry, suggesting the institution of a scholarship.

Having worked as an electrician for nearly four decades, he also pleaded for the establishment of a trade school. "The amount of young men that have been buried, I can't count them... We need to

take the guns out of their hands and put some tools in their hands...I could donate my time,” Mr. Sasso suggested.

Lawmakers, promising to take his suggestions into consideration, voted favorably upon Bill 36-0007. At the appropriate time, Mr. Sasso will receive a perma plaque copy of the resolution.

© Viconsortium 2025