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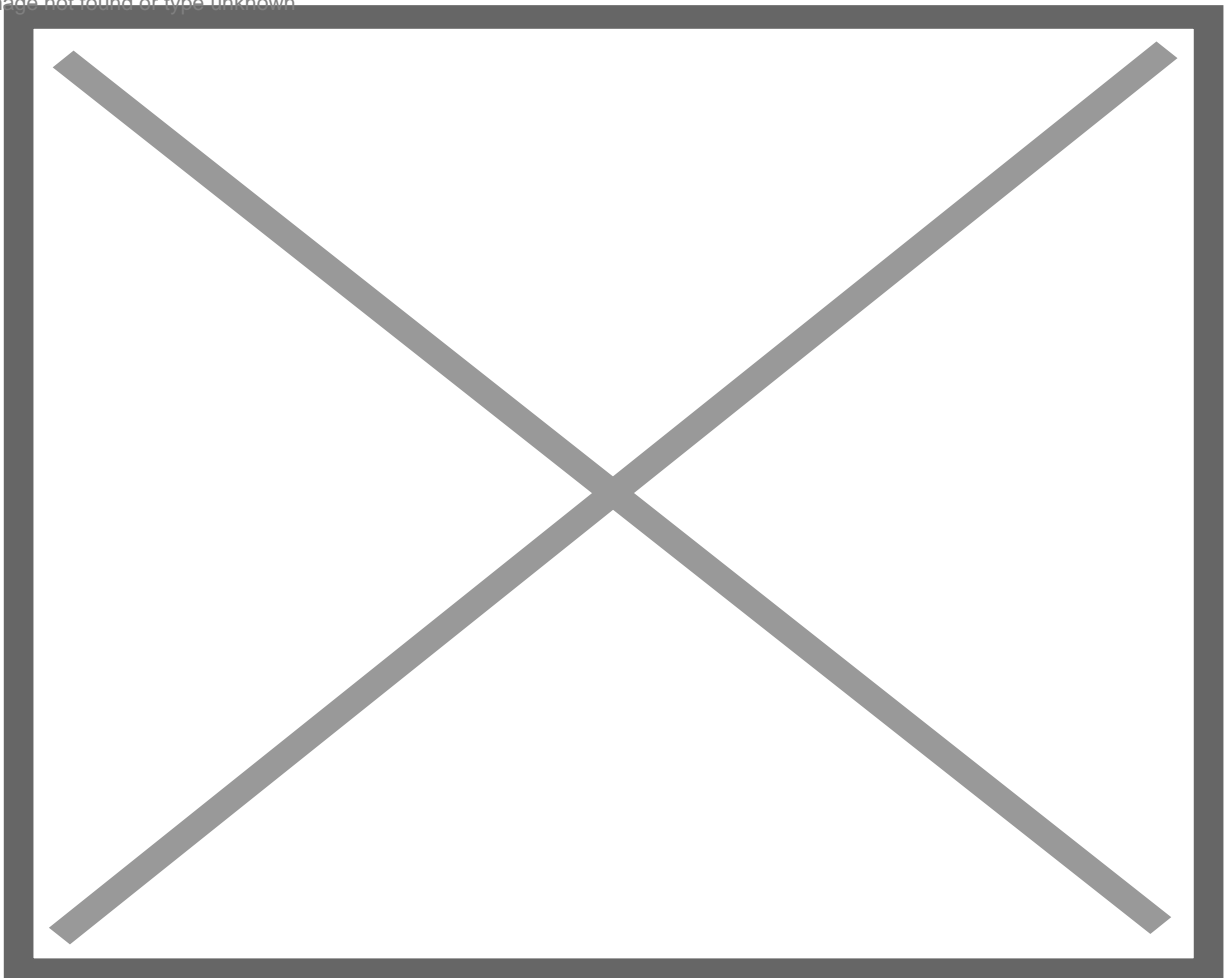
After 22 Homicides in 2025, Lawmakers Advance Bill to Establish Virgin Islands Gun Violence Awareness Week

Senator Angel Bolques Jr.’s bill to establish a week of remembrance and action on gun violence passed committee Monday. With 22 homicides already this year, lawmakers say the time has come for healing, education, and serious community engagement.

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Nelcia Charlemagne **June 24, 2025**

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The decision by lawmakers to establish a week dedicated to gun violence awareness came hours after the territory recorded a particularly “bloody weekend,” as Senator Novelle Francis Jr. called it. A double homicide on St. John and a fatality on St. Croix brought the territory’s homicide toll to [22 as of June 23rd](#).

Mr. Francis was speaking during a meeting of the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protections, as he and other committee members deliberated [Bill 36-0090](#). Sponsored by Senator Angel Bolques Jr., the measure seeks to “declare the week beginning the Monday before the first Friday in June as the Virgin Islands Gun Violence Awareness Week.”

According to Bolques, “this bill is not ceremonial. It is a call to remembrance, a call to intervention and a call to action.” He believes that “there is an urgent need to confront and uproot the culture of violence that is before us.” That work, he argues, must take the form of “a long term holistic approach to this overwhelming challenge.” Establishing the awareness week, he argued, would encourage “awareness, education and community healing.”

Referring to the proposed week as a “solemn and action-oriented time,” the senator hopes that it will encourage education, outreach, mentorship, and community engagement.

Though unable to attend the meeting, V.I. Police Department Commissioner Mario Brooks submitted correspondence in support of Bill 36-0090. The Office of Gun Violence Prevention also backed the measure. Present to testify was its executive director, Antonio Emmanuel. “The Office of Gun Violence Prevention does not wait for a designated day, week or month to be active or engaged in our community,” he said. Nonetheless, he maintained that a dedicated week “will help influence government agencies, community organizations and other community stakeholders” to use the time to focus on “effective outreach.”

“This is an easy bill for me to support but we have work to do in this community, and it takes all of us,” said Sen. Francis. A veteran law enforcement officer, Francis admitted that his “heart is heavy” when contemplating the toll of gun violence in the territory.

“It starts with the community,” agreed Senator Franklin Johnson. “The police department can’t do it alone, gun violence ain’t gonna do it alone... and the Bureau of Corrections can’t.” He called on parents to pay greater attention to the actions of their children. “When we did these programs we always tell those children [that] a life of crime is only three places. If you're lucky, you're going to the hospital. If you got a little bit of luck, you end up in prison, and when you have no luck, you end up in a graveyard.”

“You know that old adage, it takes a village to raise a child? It’s so true. You as a parent cannot do it by yourself,” added Senator Carla Joseph. She too supported the bill, calling for greater community engagement on the issue.

Visibly emotional, Senator Alma Francis Heyliger expressed some reservations about the measure. Outside of potential budgetary concerns for hosting observational activities, the lawmaker was worried that the intent and impact of the bill would eventually get lost. “This is almost a celebration because we got the month, we got the day, we're now adding a week. At what point do we have the office of unsolved murders?” she asked, her words reminding everyone present that the lawmaker's own brother was the victim of a homicide that remains unsolved to this day. “It's starting to sound like we are pushing so hard to make sure that we're aware of gun violence. You don't think I'm aware of it?”

“All of us may have also lost someone and I understand the pain, and that's why we're trying. It's a collective effort,” Senator Bolques offered. “By establishing this week, I don't think it hurts anything.”

Senator Francis Heyliger would eventually come around, joining her colleagues in voting in favor of the bill. It will now be considered during an upcoming meeting of the Committee on Rules and

Judiciary.

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