

## Blyden's Pension Amendment Fails as Lawmakers Advance Streetlight, EMS, Scholarship, and Cricket Field on St. Croix in Busy Session

Blyden's effort to raise retirement contributions for top officials failed, but lawmakers approved funding for EMS billing, streetlights, aviation scholarships, appraiser training, and a \$2.1 million grant for St. Croix cricket field development.

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Nelcia Charlemagne **June 28, 2025**

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Gittens during Friday's session, where he secured \$2.1 million for the development of the St. Croix cricket field through a Community Facilities Trust Fund appropriation. Ask ChatGPT By. V.I. LEGISLATURE.

An attempt by Senator Marvin Blyden to increase the percentage that the governor and lieutenant governor contribute to the retirement system from 9% to 15% failed by a slim margin on Friday after 7 of his colleagues voted against it, and one absented himself from the vote.

Senator Blyden's proposal was one of over ten non-germane amendments made to Bill 36-0064, identified as the bill to which unrelated amendments could be made. The percentage "had not been changed over the last 35 years," the lawmaker told Senator Kenneth Gittens, who immediately stood in opposition. Gittens said his hesitations stemmed from a desire to know that the "effective date is accurate." Particularly, he was interested in knowing whether the "annuity rate can be adjusted in the middle upwards of the current sitting official's term."

That question prompted Blyden to seek an opinion from the Legislature's legal counsel, who indicated that "based on how the amendment is currently drafted, this would take effect upon enactment of the bill, assuming this is signed into law." According to the legal opinion, "there's no legal prohibition on this body adopting this as is."

The reassurance, however, did not convince the seven lawmakers who ultimately voted against the amendment: Senators Kenneth Gittens, Milton Potter, Marise James, Novelle Francis, Franklin Johnson, Carla Joseph, and Avery Lewis decided not to support Blyden's measure. Senator Ray Fonseca was not present for the vote. With only seven votes in the affirmative, the measure failed.

Other non-germane amendments did receive the green light from the legislative body, however. Among them was a motion presented by Senator Kurt Vialet to allow the V.I. Fire and Emergency Medical Services to obtain a federal identification number and manage a billing and collection system for ambulance service. The absence of such an arrangement was discussed during VIFEMS' budget hearing earlier in the week. Currently, VIFEMS participates in a cost-share arrangement with the Department of Health for ambulance billing. Legislators felt that the entirety of the funds should be remitted to VIFEMS, hence the non-germane amendment.

Lawmakers also agreed to transfer \$296,700 from the St. Thomas Street Lighting Fund to the Water and Power Authority for the purchase and installation of street lighting in St. Thomas along the route from the University of the Virgin Islands to Raphune Hill. The motion was brought by Senator Avery Lewis, who indicated that WAPA "shall submit a written report to the legislature of the Virgin Islands identifying the specific locations along the route where the street lights were installed" 90 days after the project is completed.

Senator Novelle Francis moved to appropriate \$44,000 from the Territorial Scholarship Fund to the V.I. Board of Education for the administration of the Caroline Felicia Adams Aviation Scholarship. Another of Francis's amendments grants an "alternative pathway to aspiring appraisers to gain practical experience known as practical applications of real estate appraisal. This amendment is offered at the request of the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs, which is seeking to build a pool of appraisers in the territory."

Another amends Act 8872, relating to some \$100,000 for the Virgin Islands Little League District, by striking out Girls' Softball Leagues in both districts and making the funds available until expended.

Senator Kenneth Gittens, meanwhile, moved a motion to appropriate \$2,175,000 from the Community Facilities Trust Fund to the Department of Sports, Parks, and Recreation as a grant to the Twin City Cricket Association for the "development of the St. Croix cricket field. The sum

remains available until expended.”

[Bill 36-0064](#), with its many amendments, was only one of [nearly twenty bills](#) forwarded to the governor’s desk by the full body. It is now Governor Albert Bryan Jr’s decision whether the Legislature’s proposals will become law.

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