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Senate Committee Advances Bill to Raise Container Import Fees, Citing Infrastructure Costs and Fairer Contributions

The bill raises container fees to \$100 and \$200, depending on size, with half of collections supporting the Waste Management Authority. Lawmakers say the measure modernizes outdated rates, though some questioned whether costs might reach consumers.

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The V.I. Port Authority's Crown Bay Cargo Facility on July 5, 2025. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM.

[Bill 39-0039](#), legislation that seeks to increase the cost of bringing containers or flat rack containers into the Virgin Islands, returned to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary on Thursday

after previously being held in that committee for further vetting.

Once again, bill sponsor Senator Angel Bolques Jr. argued that the measure offers a “long overdue adjustment that asks those who profit the most from our infrastructure to contribute their fair share while protecting the small retailers.”

Aware that there have been “some apprehensions” from the public, Bolques delivered a presentation that he hoped would help resolve any misgivings. He began by dispelling the sentiment that the new fees are “going to be a burden.” Instead, the lawmaker says the container tax reform is “modernizing import fees for cleaner communities and fairer contributions.”

The current fee structure has remained “unchanged for 23 years” and the new changes will reflect a “fair share approach,” explained Mr. Bolques. This means that “large volume importers, or high volume importers,” will bear the brunt of the new fees, he says.

“While essential to our economy, large importers and corporate shippers also generate the most container waste and place the heaviest load on our public infrastructure,” Bolques pointed stated. That’s why this cohort is the “fairest group to help fund its upkeep,” he argued. Half of the fees collected will be deposited into the general fund, while the Waste Management Authority will receive the other portion for specific purposes. After 5 years, the ratio will shift to allot 25% of the fees to WMA, with the remaining three quarters directed into the general fund.

The measure deviates from the standard in other countries that charge fees based on the value of the products in the container, as it would assess fees based on the container’s length.

Containers of up to 39 feet will be charged \$100 instead of \$50, while those 40 feet and above will be charged \$200 instead of the previous \$100. The new flat rack fee will cost \$5 more, Bolques said, arguing that flat racks have a “larger impact on our infrastructure” since they transport “heavy machinery” and building materials like steel.

Small businesses often import palettes which attract only shipping costs, not container fees, noted the senator. “The small businesses have no impact as long as they have a less than container load” of goods, he assured.

Public commentary has included concerns that the new cost will be passed on to consumers. Bolques disagreed. “It applies to importers and not consumers,” he insisted. He also reminded the public that several categories of products manufactured in the United States are exempt from customs duties and container-related excise fees. That includes food and fuel.

Other exemptions include molasses, rum, fuel, coal, oil, gas, animal feed, fertilizers and other essential goods. The food category includes “all nutritive matter, including water.” Exemptions continue with “certain contractor imports, medications and medical devices that are specifically for our hospitals” as well as “packing materials, paper, plastic, glass, wood” and even perfume.

Senator Bolques clarified that importers who bring in containers but do not remove them from the port will not be subject to the container tax. He explained that while a truck driver may enter the port to collect goods, “there is no container tax fee,” though the individual is still responsible for paying standard shipping charges.

Based on analysis from the Legislature’s post-audit division, Bolques expressed excitement about the potential revenue increases for the Government of the Virgin Islands. In the last fiscal year, container tax collections totaled \$1.7 million. “With the proposed rate, we can bring in \$3.5

[million],” he said. There is a potential to achieve even higher gains in subsequent years, as concurrent construction projects will require the importation of supplies.

“So again, this is not a tax on our people. It's an investment in our future,” he declared.

Senator Avery Lewis, who admitted that he was previously apprehensive about the potential impact on the purchasing public, says that he also understands the bill’s role as a revenue generator. “At times, we just have to take the leap of faith, and this is one of them,” he said.

Senator Milton Potter was also slightly “torn.” “My concern is, do they ever really pay? Ultimately, do they pass it on to the regular Virgin Islander?” he asked, referring to the fair share argument. Still, he indicated his intention to support the bill based on a “cost-benefit analysis.”

The bill was passed and will now move to the full body for further consideration. So too will the following measures:

[Bill No. 36-0123](#) An act amending title 20 Virgin Islands Code, part II, chapter 43, subchapter I, section 493 making it unlawful for a person who has 0.04 percent or more, by weight, of alcohol in his blood to operate a commercial motor vehicle, and making it unlawful for a person under the age of 21 years who has any detectable amount of alcohol in his blood, to operate a motor vehicle.

[Bill No. 36-0136](#) An act amending title 23 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 17, subchapter II by adding new sections 1331 through 1336 mandating lethal weapon training for security guards and investigators.

[Bill No. 36-0099](#) An act amending title 34 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 15 expanding the Elder and Dependent Adult Abuse Prevention Act.

[Bill No. 36-0061](#) An Act amending title 3 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 27, section 706 and chapter 28A, section 755 allowing retirees who are receiving an annuity from the Government

Employees Retirement System who are subsequently employed by the University of the Virgin Islands (“UVI”), to continue to receive their GERS annuity while receiving their salary from the University if the retiree enrolls in a different retirement plan.

[Bill No. 36-0058](#) An Act honoring and commending Dennis “Pumpa” Lennox Leroy Liburd, Jr. for his many contributions to the Virgin Islands culture and music industry as a Soca artist by awarding him the Official key to the Territory and naming the main entrance of 6-Y Peters Rest Road, Christiansted, St. Croix in his honor.

[Bill No. 36-0107](#) A resolution honoring and commending Dr. Alfred Lee Anduze for his outstanding achievements and significant contributions to the fields of medicine, science, public health, and community empowerment.

[Bill No. 36-0121](#) An act to rename the Peter Carl Limpricht Park the TSK Park in honor of the Ten Sleepless Knights quelbe band and making an appropriation to effectuate that change.

[Bill No. 36-0110](#) An Act amending title 20 Virgin Islands Code, part I, chapter 1 to require a permit from the Virgin Islands Department of Public Works before the excavation of any public roadway.