

## Senator Lewis Introduces Bill Expanding Election Access for Government Employees

**Measure co-sponsored by Senator Marise James seeks to eliminate longstanding restrictions that have forced Virgin Islands government employees to take leave to run for elected office, ensuring fairness, equity, and broader participation in public service.**

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**The V.I. Legislature in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM.**

Senator Avery Lewis has announced his full support for Bill No. 36-0134, legislation he co-sponsored with Senator Marise C. James, that would repeal and reenact Title 18, Chapter 1, Section 2 of the Virgin Islands Code to allow eligible government employees to seek elected office without being forced to take leave from their positions — unless otherwise prohibited by

federal law.

“Bill 36-0134 is about fairness, equity, and removing unnecessary barriers that have kept too many Virgin Islanders from stepping forward to serve,” stated Lewis. “For far too long, an uneven playing field has existed where only those with the financial comfort to take unpaid leave could realistically run for public office. That is not democracy. That is a filter that silences voices before they even get the chance to be heard.”

The legislation clarifies that government employees will be permitted to remain actively employed while campaigning, provided they do not engage in political activity during working hours, misuse government resources, or occupy positions explicitly restricted by federal laws such as the Hatch Act.

By redefining the eligibility framework, Bill 36-0134 seeks to clarify the rights of government workers as full citizens, seeking to balance professional responsibility with civic engagement. According to its authors, the measure maintains essential safeguards for judicial officers, law clerks, and employees working in federally restricted roles.

Lewis noted that this effort represents a broader call for inclusion in public life, noting that the bill aims to make participation in democracy accessible to all, not just to those with financial flexibility.

“As leaders, we speak about equity, opportunity, and representation — but change requires action,” he said. “If we genuinely believe in broadening participation in government, then we must eliminate outdated barriers that prevent dedicated public servants from answering the call to serve in elected office.”

Calling the legislation both reformative and empowering, Senator Lewis described it as an invitation for greater public involvement in the democratic process. “This bill is not just a policy reform — it is an invitation for more Virgin Islanders to lead, to contribute, and to bring their experience from the workforce into the halls of governance. Democracy should not be reserved for the privileged. It must be accessible to all,” he said.

The senator concluded with an appeal to residents to actively support the measure. “I urge every resident who believes in fairness, equity, and the right to participate in our democracy to contact your senators and encourage their support for Bill 36-0134,” he said. “This is our opportunity to show that we do not just speak about fairness — we practice it and make policy that guarantees fairness for everyone.”