

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Governor Bryan Signs Wage Increase Into Law and Approves Broad Slate of Bills From January Session

Governor Albert Bryan Jr. signed multiple bills from the Legislature's January 12 session into law, while urging lawmakers to revisit portions of new cannabis and caregiver statutes to address regulatory and technical concerns.

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Governor Albert Bryan Jr.

Governor Albert Bryan Jr. has taken action on a slate of legislation approved by the 36th Legislature earlier this month, signing eight bills into law, advancing a minimum wage increase, approving multiple lease and property agreements, and requesting

amendments to newly enacted cannabis and caregiver-related measures.

The actions, formalized in correspondence dated January 26, follow the Legislature's regular session held on January 12, during which lawmakers passed a series of bills spanning labor, housing, insurance regulation, infrastructure, and tourism.

Among the measures approved by the governor is Bill No. 36-0030, which amends Title 24 of the Virgin Islands Code to increase the territory's minimum wage. In his transmission letter to Senate President Milton Potter, Governor Bryan described the wage increase as "an important step forward in improving the standard of living for Virgin Islands residents." The minimum wage measure establishes a phased increase in the hourly wage to \$16.00 over three years. Under the schedule, the wage would rise to \$12.00 ninety days after enactment, followed by annual increases until it reaches \$16.00 per hour.

The governor also acknowledged the Legislature's favorable action on the nomination of attorney Pedro Williams to serve as a judge of the Virgin Islands Superior Court for the St. Thomas–St. John District.

In addition to the wage measure, Governor Bryan approved a series of lease agreements involving government property. Bill No. 36-0089 authorizes a lease between the Government of the Virgin Islands and PEO Productions, LLC, doing business as WSTA Radio, for property in St. Thomas. Bill No. 36-0092 approves a lease agreement between the government and St. John Taxi Services Corporation for property in Cruz Bay.

The governor also approved Bill No. 36-0217, authorizing the sale of Parcel No. 20-A Hospital Street in Christiansted, St. Croix, to Z Property VI LLC for \$260,000. Proceeds from the sale are designated for the Virgin Islands State Historic Preservation Office to support grants for the revitalization and rehabilitation of historic buildings.

Another approved measure, Bill No. 36-0222, designates January 27, 2026, as St. John Legendary Rhythm and Blues Cruise Day and appropriates up to \$35,000 from the Tourism Advertising Revolving Fund to the Department of Tourism to organize and host related festivities.

Governor Bryan also acted on Bill No. 36-0184, which amends the Virgin Islands Insurance Holding Company System Regulatory Act to implement revisions adopted by the National Association of Insurance Commissioners. The governor noted that the measure is necessary to maintain the territory's NAIC accreditation and strengthen policyholder protections.

With respect to cannabis regulation, the governor approved Bill No. 36-0105, which amends Title 7 of the Virgin Islands Code to prohibit the possession, sale, or manufacture of specific intoxicating hemp and artificially derived cannabinoid products. However, acting on the recommendation of the Office of Cannabis Regulation, Governor Bryan stated that he is submitting proposed amendments separately and urged the Legislature to address them promptly "to preserve appropriate regulation within the industry."

Governor Bryan also approved Bill No. 36-0210, which appropriates \$4 million from the Virgin Islands Insurance Guaranty Fund to the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority

for the repair, replacement, and operation of streetlights. The measure also amends multiple statutes related to caregiver leave, medical licensure requirements, burial of veterans, and other administrative provisions. While signing the bill, the governor requested prompt legislative amendments to several sections, including changes to the definition of “serious illness” under the Caregivers Leave Act, consistency in statutory publication requirements, and terminology related to rental vehicles.

In his correspondence, Governor Bryan also acknowledged the Legislature’s override of his veto of Section 2 of Act No. 9052 (Bill No. 36-0119). Addressing the broader relationship between the executive and legislative branches, he wrote: “It is my sincere hope that both branches will continue to exercise their respective authorities in a manner that respects the balance of powers and ensures timely action in the appointment and confirmation of members of the judiciary.”

The governor additionally recognized legislative resolutions honoring U.S. Senator Mike Crapo for his role in securing a permanent increase in the rum cover-over tax reimbursement, as well as a resolution honoring the life and service of former Warden Thomas Martin.