

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Committee Backs Donohoo for Contractors Board After Forceful Trades Advocacy

Joseph Donohoo won strong committee support for the Board of Contractors, Trades and Crafts, urging rigorous licensing standards, bonding reform and greater respect for skilled trades as a pathway to stability.

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Joseph Donohoo. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE.

Joseph Donohoo's nomination to serve on the V.I. Board of Contractors, Trades, and Crafts advanced Thursday with strong backing from members of the Committee on Rules and Judiciary, who expressed overwhelming support following his testimony.

Appearing before lawmakers, Donohoo framed the appointment as personal and purposeful. Having first arrived on St. Croix at age fourteen after Hurricane Hugo, he said the nomination represents an “opportunity to give back to the committee community that has shaped the man I have become.” His father, a tradesman, introduced him to the profession early on.

“I chose the trades not because I lacked options, but because I had a purpose,” he told senators. “A trade is security, a trade is independence, and a trade is resilience.”

Donohoo emphasized the role of strong trade programs in creating pathways for young Virgin Islanders, particularly those who may not see themselves pursuing traditional academic routes. Trades, he said, can “give young people, especially those who may not see themselves as college material, a path to dignity, stability and global opportunity.” A skilled tradesperson, he added, can “go anywhere in the world and earn a living.”

He underscored the importance of maintaining rigorous licensing and accreditation standards. Donohoo recounted that he sat for his master plumbing license examination three times, failing twice before ultimately passing.

“The test is hard, and it should be. When the Virgin Islands issues a license, it should represent excellence,” he said.

While advocating for high standards, he suggested the territory place greater emphasis on exam preparation. Structured test programs similar to those on the mainland could “better equip apprentices and create a pathway for those currently working unlicensed to become legitimate professionals,” he said.

Accountability within the trades was another priority.

“License holders who sign permits must stand behind their work and the work that's done under their credentials. If we strengthen accountability, we will protect the public and uphold the integrity of the trades,” he stated.

Donohoo also addressed challenges facing local contractors during what he described as a “season of unprecedented federal investment” in the Virgin Islands. He pointed to bonding requirements as a “significant barrier for local contractors,” explaining that the current system “limits local companies and creates disadvantages that often force partnerships that dilute local ownership.” He expressed interest in working with fellow board members to explore solutions that would allow local firms to “compete federally without having to sell what they have worked so hard and decades to build.”

Administrative burdens tied to federal projects were another concern. Many tradesmen, he said, struggle with paperwork and “suffer financially because they were unprepared for the administrative burden.” He indicated he would advocate for “educational clinics” to help contractors navigate those requirements.

“If we are not proactive, we risk damaging the very trade community we depend on to rebuild and grow,” he warned.

Lawmakers praised Donohoo’s testimony and sought his perspective on encouraging more young Virgin Islanders to pursue the trades.

“I think we as a community need to start holding the trades with respect,” he told Senator Carla Joseph, the committee’s chair. “You gotta let kids know that it's okay to work with your hands, it's okay to get dirty. It's okay to sweat.”

Responding to Senator Alma Francis Heyliger, Donohoo said his foremost goal is to motivate tradesmen to pursue required coursework to “become legit and be their own licensed tradesman.”

Senator Novelle Francis commended his advocacy, stating, “It's so important for individuals to learn a trade, regardless of whether or not they want to make that a career,” and welcomed suggestions from Donohoo on addressing bonding challenges.

With committee approval secured, Donohoo’s nomination now moves to the full Legislature for further consideration.