

The Virgin Islands Consortium

James Raises Questions After Bill Letting Gov't Employees Run Without Taking Leave Was Left Off Session Agenda

Senator Marise James said the measure was left off the March 18 agenda, raising the possibility that government employees who hope to run in the 2026 general election could soon be required to take leave from their jobs.

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Senator Marise James. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE.

Government employees hoping to seek public office in the 2026 general election could soon face a practical barrier if a pending bill is not enacted within the next several weeks.

Senator Marise James said legislation that would allow government employees to remain actively employed while running for office was not placed on the agenda for the March 18 legislative session, and because of an election-year legal deadline, delay now carries immediate consequences for potential candidates.

In a statement issued Monday, Senator James responded to public questions about the status of Bill No. 36-0134, a measure that seeks to repeal and reenact Title 18, Virgin Islands Code, Chapter 1, Section 2, relating to government employees' eligibility for elected office.

If enacted, the bill would allow government employees to run for political office while remaining on the job, except where federal law or other applicable law prohibits it. According to the statement, the legislation is intended to remove the financial barrier that may discourage qualified individuals from seeking public office.

James said the bill was not included on the agenda for the March 18, 2026 legislative session. She also said she was not present at that session and therefore could not provide a specific explanation as to why the measure was not taken up for consideration. Her presence, she noted, was not necessary for the bill to be considered.

The statement also says James did not move to have the bill heard during the January 26 State of the Territory Address, because she had been given assurances that the legislation would be scheduled for the next legislative session.

At the center of the issue is a statutory restriction tied to the election calendar. James pointed to Title 18, Virgin Islands Code, Section 6, which states that "no amendments to this title shall be enacted by the Legislature in the period of six (6) months immediately preceding the date of a general election except in compliance with an order issued by a court of competent jurisdiction."

According to the statement, that restriction means that if Bill No. 36-0134 is not enacted by April 2026, government employees who want to run for office in November 2026 will have to take leave from their positions in order to do so.

The release further states that failure to enact the bill before May 2026 would create "an immediate and practical impact" for would-be candidates and highlights the consequences of delayed legislative action.

James said she remains committed to transparency and to keeping the public informed about both the legislative process and the issues affecting Bill No. 36-0134.