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Street Renaming for Detective Delberth Phipps Jr. Advances as Family, VIPD and Lawmakers Honor His Sacrifice

Bill 36-0191 would rename a portion of Hospital Gade in honor of Detective Delberth Phipps Jr., who was killed in the line of duty on July 4, 2023, as family, friends, VIPD officials and lawmakers offered emotional testimony on his service.

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A portrait of slain VIPD Detective Delberth Phipps, Jr. at a podium where speakers recalled the detective's dedication to law enforcement, his love for motorcycles, and passion for life during a candlelight vigil on Friday, July 14, 2023. By. MEDIA ONE/VIPD.

For the family of Detective Delberth Phipps Jr., July 4, 2023 will forever be remembered as the day his life was cut short in the line of duty. Now, lawmakers are moving to ensure that his name and sacrifice remain permanently recognized in the territory through the renaming of a St. Thomas roadway in his honor.

Bill No. 36-0191, sponsored by Senator Angel Bolques Jr., would rename the portion of Hospital Gade where it intersects with Veterans Drive, at the Alexander Farrelly Criminal Justice Complex, to the beginning of Maude Proudfoot Drive, as “Delberth Phipps, Jr., Street.”

During Thursday’s hearing, lawmakers and family members later agreed that it would be fitting to rename the entire street in his honor.

“We must never forget Detective Phipps’ service, his sacrifice and his dedication to protecting the people of this territory,” said Senator Bolques. “His legacy is not just that he passed away, but it is really, in fact, how he lived with courage, with compassion and an unwavering commitment to others.”

The hearing was marked by emotional testimony from family members, friends, law enforcement colleagues and government officials, each reflecting on Detective Phipps’ life, his service, and the impact he left behind.

His father, Delberth Phipps Sr., who was also a police officer, said his son had long wanted to join the police force, even after pursuing other career paths.

“It was a very proud moment for us to see our son graduating and becoming a full fledged member of the police force,” Mr. Phipps Sr said. “Delberth took his profession very seriously, whether on or off duty, he acted as if he was always on duty,” he added.

Mr. Phipps Sr. said his son answered a call for assistance from two colleagues and lost his life in the process.

“He stood by the motto to protect and to serve with his life on that dreadful day.”

Detective Phipps’ son, Demel Phipps, spoke about the deep personal loss caused by his father’s death.

“Often since he’s been gone, I felt that I’ve had impossible shoes to fill. My dad pushed me and with him gone, I can physically feel the void on my back. That’s just how deep his impact was,” he said.

Police Chief Deborah Hodge also offered moving testimony, describing Detective Phipps as someone who was always willing to go the extra mile and as a “true ambassador of these Virgin Islands.”

“This community should never forget detective Delbert Phipps Junior’s willingness to go to distance when called upon to serve,” Chief Hodge said.

Vivian Newton, a police officer who met Detective Phipps Jr. in preschool, shared stories about their friendship, seeking his father’s blessing to become a police officer, and the significant impact Detective Phipps made within the V.I. Police Department.

Renaming the road “is a lasting tribute to a man who dedicated his life to justice, service community, and who paid the ultimate sacrifice in the performance of his duties,” Ms. Newton testified.

Jerry Innis of the Department of Justice said the measure would preserve Detective Phipps’ example for future generations.

“By supporting this bill, we're not only honoring a fallen hero. We're ensuring that future generations will know his name, understand his sacrifice and be inspired by his example,” he said.

Vernon Carr, Detective Phipps Jr.’s best friend, delivered tearful remarks about the depth of their bond.

“That day, I didn't lose a coworker or a friend. I lost a brother. The road being designated in his honor carries a sacrifice far greater than words could ever express,” he said.

Captain Maria Colon, officer in charge of VIPD’s Training Bureau, said the street should stand as a reminder of the sacrifice made by law enforcement officers.

“May this street serve as a constant reminder that heroes walk among us and that some give everything so that others may live in safety,” she stated.

Lawmakers joined the family and law enforcement community in reflecting on Detective Phipps’ sacrifice. Senator Franklin Johnson addressed Mr. Phipps Sr., acknowledging the influence he had on his son.

“I say thank you for bringing up your child in a manner in which you did to the point that he wanted to be just like you,” Senator Johnson said.

Senator Novelle Francis, who worked in law enforcement for decades, said the hearing stirred deep emotion.

“Certainly, today has evoked a lot of my emotions,” he said. “I'm sorry that you had to endure this, but your son had made the ultimate sacrifice,” he said. “We all know that we have lost a hero, and for that, we want to ensure that it's enshrined in the annals of the Virgin Islands community forever.”

Senator Kenneth Gittens said he intends to introduce an amendment to ensure the street name follows the appropriate naming convention, making it the Delberth Phipps Jr. Memorial Street.

“We want him to be properly recognized for his distinguished service and sacrifice in the line of duty,” Senator Gittens said.

The Committee voted in favor of Bill No. 36-0191, advancing the measure just days before the start of Police Week, when the contributions of those who serve in law enforcement are recognized and celebrated.