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## Federal Pressure, Appeals Court Ruling Add New Scrutiny to Firearms Bill Awaiting Bryan's Decision

**Bill 36-0144 would define and prohibit assault rifles, ban suppressors and silencers, and prohibit large-capacity magazines; now Bryan faces a veto request from U.S. Senator Mike Lee and a federal appeals ruling that silencers are protected as "Arms."**

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With time winding down for Governor Albert Bryan Jr. to act on [Bill 36-0144](#) before it automatically becomes law, pressure is increasing for him to reject the controversial firearms measure after a U.S. senator urged a veto and a federal appeals court ruled that silencers are protected under the Second Amendment.

Bill 36-0144, championed by Senator Clifford Joseph and [passed by the Legislature on June 12](#), would define and prohibit assault rifles, ban suppressors and silencers, require safety training for licensed rifle and shotgun holders, restrict magazines holding more than 15 rounds, and prevent illegal sales of firearms, firearm accessories and ammunition.

Attorney General Gordon Rhea has supported the bill, saying it “was written to protect the constitutional rights of law-abiding Virgin Islands to keep and bear arms” while giving police the tools to “keep illegal guns out of the wrong hands.”

Local gun-rights advocates have pushed back against that position for months, calling the bill overly restrictive and accusing lawmakers of using tactics that discouraged opposition. Former gun shop owner Ehren Henderson said Bill 36-0144 “only weakens our ability to defend ourselves and our families.”

Kosei Ohno, head of Virgin Islands Safe Gun Owners, cited months of last-minute invitations to testify, abruptly canceled legislative debates and uncirculated amendments as evidence of what opponents viewed as an effort to limit dissenting voices.

Now, with the bill awaiting Governor Bryan’s decision, federal voices have entered the debate.

During Governor Bryan’s June 17 appearance before the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, Senator Mike Lee of Utah asked him to “consider a veto” of the bill.

“It appears to present serious questions as to whether it can withstand scrutiny under the Second Amendment,” Senator Lee said.

A day later, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals [ruled](#) that silencers, which are banned under Bill 36-0144, are protected by the Second Amendment. “Because silencers are used in self-defense...they are Second Amendment ‘Arms’,” the court declared.

On the day the Legislature passed Bill 36-0144, Attorney General Rhea defended the measure as a way to “keep control of our own firearms policy” amid a [pending lawsuit](#) filed by the U.S. Department of Justice against the V.I. Police Department.

The U.S. Department of Justice lawsuit challenges the territory’s firearm licensing framework, and Mr. Rhea has argued that the bill is intended to place the Virgin Islands on stronger legal footing while preserving local authority over firearms policy.

However, Senator Lee’s comments and the Fifth Circuit’s ruling on silencers may now complicate that argument, particularly as Governor Bryan weighs whether to sign the measure, veto it, or allow it to become law without his signature.