

Senate Approves Temporary Law-Enforcement Integration Plan to Boost Police Manpower and Fight Violent Crime

All 14 senators present backed the temporary initiative to increase police manpower, coordinate public-safety operations and reduce violent crime, while separately approving \$2.92 million for UVI general operations, also without floor debate Tuesday.

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All 14 senators present Tuesday unanimously approved legislation creating a temporary law-enforcement integration initiative intended to increase police manpower and address violent crime across the territory, while separately advancing a \$2,917,519 appropriation for the University of the Virgin Islands.

Both measures were brought to the floor through the special-order process and advanced without debate. They now await action by Gov. Albert Bryan Jr.

Sen. Kenneth Gittens special ordered Bill 36-0332, which establishes the temporary initiative to strengthen public-safety operations, increase available law-enforcement personnel and reduce violent crime throughout the Virgin Islands.

Although the session provided no time for lawmakers to discuss the measure, every senator present voted in favor of its final passage.

Sen. Carla Joseph initially voted against placing the bill on special order but later joined her colleagues in supporting its passage.

Joseph explained that she objected “because I want us to take this bill very seriously.”

She warned that legislative approval alone would not be sufficient unless the initiative is carried out.

“if this bill is not implemented...our next step is that we're going to have to take the governor to court to implement.”

Joseph added that “we need to be taking crime seriously.”

UVI Receives Nearly \$2.9 Million

Lawmakers also unanimously supported Bill 36-0343, another measure placed on special order during Tuesday’s session.

Introduced by Sen. Novelle Francis Jr., the bill appropriates \$2,917,519 to UVI for general operating expenses.

The vote came one day after UVI leaders appeared before the Senate Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance and described the university’s continuing financial challenges.

UVI President Dr. Safiya George told lawmakers Monday that delayed government allotments had contributed to the university’s financial condition and its failure to meet one of seven standards established by its accrediting body.

The university remains accredited but must demonstrate by September 1, 2026, that it has addressed the identified deficiencies. That deadline is less than one month away.

Because Bill 36-0343 advanced without discussion, lawmakers provided no public explanation for the particularly specific appropriation amount or why it was being approved less than two months before the close of the fiscal year.

The measure now awaits the governor’s signature.