

The Virgin Islands Consortium

De Jongh Signs 45 Bills Into Law, Vetoes 2

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Governor de Jongh, in his last few months as the leader of the territory, has been busy working on the government's fiscal year 2015 budget sent to his desk by the 30th Legislature, signing most of the measures and vetoing two.

There are other measures the Governor has yet to tackle, including the unpopular 'Streetlights Bill', which gives the Virgin Island Water and Power Authority the power to bill residents for streetlight usage. Nonetheless, action was taken on a number of measures, including text books for public schools, decriminalization of marijuana, the naming of facilities for prominent Virgin Islanders, ratifying Coastal Zone permits and more.

Even as he expressed concern over the two pieces of legislation, the Governor signed bills No. 30-0431 and No. 30-0499 into law.

Regarding Bill No. 30-0431, which amended the Hotel Development Program, de Jongh questioned the "implications and consequences of this measure on the Government's debt limit and borrowing capacity" arising from possible lease guarantees. De Jongh was also concerned about certain inconsistencies in the terms of the program that he says should be clarified by further amendments.

In relation to Bill No. 30-0499, which authorizes the transportation of Plot No. 184 in St. Croix's Estate Anna's Hope to American Legion Post 102, de Jongh wasn't sure the proposed use of the property for a headquarters building was in "concert with the zoning requirements or whether any possible deed restrictions or covenants exist."

"I plan to submit Legislation to address these matters as well as achieve a partnership between the Government and Post 102 so that the land is fully utilized as intended within the next ten years, otherwise it shall revert back to the Government," de Jongh wrote in a transmittal letter sent to Senate President Shawn-Michael Malone.

Vetoing a bill sponsored by Sen. Terrence "Positive" Nelson that sought to decriminalize the use of marijuana in the territory, de Jongh stated: "The measure as drafted represents an inconsistent application of law as it pertains to private employees versus" government employees, it curtails the government's ability to "enforce and regulate workplace rules and codes of conduct, particularly in those areas involving hazardous jobs, public safety and the operation of heavy equipment," and it compromises the ability of the "judiciary to effectively enforce its orders pertaining to pre-trial release and bail."

De Jongh also dismissed Bill No. 30-0392, a measure that would provide equitable distribution of property during a divorce, because of an unrelated amendment that created a new category of casinos.

"The manner in which this amendment was offered and enacted without going through the Committee process and without the proper due diligence is troubling," the governor wrote, "especially when the charrettes conducted in both the Christiansted and Frederiksted communities...definitively revealed that residents did not want casino gaming as part of their community development plans."

The casino bill was sponsored by Senator Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly. Full details [here](#).

The *VI Consortium* requested a complete list of the 45 bills the Governor signed into law, in an effort to make it available to the public. We received the following response from Virgin Islands Government Director of Communication, Jean P. Greaux, Jr.:

Unfortunately such a list as you reference does not exist. From time to time, however, I am provided by our Legal Counsel's office, a copy of each piece of legislation as it (sic) acted upon whether in the form of approval, veto or line-item veto. Should I receive copies of the bills for this action taken by the governor, I will be happy to share with you. What I have provided, a news release summarizing the action and a copy of the actual transmittal letter to the Senate President, is all that is routinely shared with me and by me with the news media.

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