

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Gittens Introduces Bill That Takes Away Retirement Benefits From Convicted Government Officials

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Update: Senator Gittens has clarified to The Consortium that the bill, if passed, would be specific to crimes of public corruption. The senator also said that the measure would not be proactive, was being worked on prior to the recent high-profile arrests, and stressed that now was the right time to bring the measure to the fore. He also pointed out that the bill was not introduced to seek out suspected criminals in government, but rather to work as a deterrent.

Earlier...

ST. CROIX -- Senator Kenneth Gittens will put forth bill No. 31-0150 on Thursday during a Committee on Rules and Judiciary session, chaired by Gittens, that seeks to take away retirement benefits from government officials -- including governors, lieutenant governors, commissioners, members of the Legislature, justices of the territory's Supreme Court, judges and magistrate judges of the Superior Court and other elected and appointed officials -- who have been convicted of any crime.

That's according to a press release issued by Gittens' office on Tuesday. The senator said the current climate where former government officials are being arrested and charged serves as the right time to introduce the legislation.

"What this bill seeks to do is – serve as a deterrent for public officials who think that it is okay to help themselves to public funds. Public funds are to be used for the betterment of our community. Therefore, we as a community should not be victimized twice, by having monies stolen from us and then by allowing the culprits, who were convicted, to continue receiving retirement benefits," Gittens said.

The second-term Democrat said there has been a deeply-rooted culture of corruption in government perpetrated by a few individuals. And Gittens lamented that even when some of these perpetrators are arrested, there are no far-reaching repercussions for their actions.

"I've been working on the wording and logistics of this legislation for some time now and we are finally going to begin the vetting process on it. I look forward to hearing the views of the invited testifiers and the concerns of my colleagues. I look forward to their support when it is time for a vote on this very important piece of legislation," he concluded.

The bill's introduction comes on the heels of the recent corruption charges [leveled against former Governor John P. de Jongh](#) by the local Dept. of Justice, and federal charges [leveled against](#) a former de Jongh administration official and others.