

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Senators Approve Bill To Give Office Of The Inspector General Independence

Government / **Published On November 19, 2015 09:51 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert **November 19, 2015**



ST. CROIX -- Members of the Committee on Government Services, Consumer and Veterans Affairs gathered at the Fritz E. Lawaetz Legislative Hall on Wednesday to discuss multiple measures, including [bill no. 31-0014](#), sponsored by Senator Clifford Graham and co-sponsored by Senators Sammuell Sanes and Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly, that aims to add more legitimacy to the Office of the Inspector General by untying it from the executive branch.

The measure seeks to give the IG more independence to "police and patrol the use of taxpayers dollars in the Virgin Islands," Mr. Graham said. He added that when the bill was heard in April, testimony was given that brought to the fore how previous

administrations had marginalized the IG's office by reducing its budget allotment; and by [denying training opportunities](#) for staff that would only enhance the way agencies are audited.



. Graham believes, will better equip its
ment -- including the legislative and executive
ial fraudulent activity.

Virgin Islands Inspector General Steven van

Beverhoudt.

"This bill essentially looks to help the Office of the Inspector General do a better job, because it will allow the inspector general to determine the salary level of the employees within his organization," Mr. Graham said. "It would allow the inspector general to manage his funding [and] determine who gets enhanced training to [perform] audits. It would also allow the Office of the Inspector General to sit down and put a comprehensive schedule of audits for the year, without interruption of a reduced budget."

"The only grey area that exists is the independency of the agency, and who really oversees the Inspector General's Office," Mr. Graham went on, adding that suggestions have been offered, and an amendment to address the concern will be forthcoming. Concerns about a funding source were also raised by invited testifier Nellon Bowry, director of the Office of Management and Budget. However, an amendment to address financing would be added to the measure at a later date.

During his testimony, Inspector General Steven van Beverhoudt, who was appointed [the territory's first IG in 1989](#) and was reappointed to serve a fourth term in 2009, echoed what he's said in the past: the Office of the Inspector General is being stifled because it's currently regulated by the executive branch, and over the years has seen its budget

dwindle to now \$2 million for fiscal year 2016, an amount that prevents the office from undertaking major probes because it lacks the funds to hire more employees. Yet, even the \$2 million budget has been slashed by 3 percent by the Governor Kenneth Mapp administration, Mr. van Beverhoudt revealed, as made known to him by Mr. Bowry on October 26 of this year.

"This cut amounts to \$60,000, which is minuscule when compared to the overall government budget, but is very significant to our operations," he said, adding that \$60,000 funds an auditor's position, and the cut comes as interviews were being conducted to fill critical positions within the agency.

"This, ladies and gentlemen, is an example of exactly why the Office of the Inspector General needs to be independent from the control of the executive branch," Mr. van Beverhoudt said. He also disagreed that the IG's office, if separated from the executive branch, would operate without oversight. He said there's provision within the law that makes clear that the inspector general can be removed from office if maleficence is committed. Law also requires the inspector general to testify before the Senate, submit a budget and lay bare its operations and how dollars are being spent.

With little opposition, the measure was approved and forwarded to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary. Senators voting in favor were Justin Harrigan Sr., Sanes, Myron Jackson and Neville James. Senators Terrence Nelson, Janet Millin Young and Tregenza Roach were absent.

Feature Image: Senator Clifford Graham, chairman of the powerful Committee on Finance, and chief sponsor of bill no. 31-0014.

Image Credit: 31st Legislature of the Virgin Islands.