

The Virgin Islands Consortium

WICO To Buy Property For Governors To Reside If New Bill Becomes Law

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ST. THOMAS -- Following a brief session at the Earl B. Ottley Legislative Hall on Thursday, where senators of the 31st Legislature moved to delay action on the ArcLight/Government of the Virgin Islands operating agreement until a hearing, set for Monday, December 21, was held on St. Croix, the lawmakers undertook a slew of other actions, including bills already approved by various committees, and one special-ordered to the flaw that would see the West Indian Company (WICO), a government-owned but self-governed (semiautonomous) entity, buying property next to Government House here, that would serve as the official residence of the Governor of the Virgin Islands.

[Bill no. 31-0295](#), sponsored by no less than 11 senators, seeks to resolve "the ongoing effort to find suitable housing for the Governor of the Virgin Islands," and mandates that the GVI, acting through WICO, "negotiate with the owner of parcels no. 21, 22, 23 and 24 Dronningen's Gade, to acquire such property for no more than the average appraised value of three recent independent appraisals."

The measure also authorizes WICO to lease the property for up to \$8,000 monthly, so long as the lease makes clear that those payments be credited towards the acquisition of the property. The bill includes specifics as they relate to security and maintenance. It would also provide temporary housing for Governor Kenneth Mapp until the property is purchased and added to the lot on which Government House sits.

In other action, senators approved a range of measures, including a Senator Sammuel Sanes-sponsored bill that enacts stiffer penalties for [those caught with assault rifles](#). The body also approved a measure sponsored by Senator Kenneth Gittens that increases gun sentences. The bill adds five years to possession of unlicensed firearm; bringing the total years to ten, and brings to 20 years the maximum sentence for using a gun during a crime, up from 15 years.

Senator Kurt Violet's truancy law, which [aims to keep students off the streets during school hours](#), won approval, as did a Senator Marvin Blyden measure [allowing government employees to participate in government-sanctioned public auctions](#).

Also winning approval were the following measures:

- A bill that aims to ease the process of setting up bank accounts held by multiple owners. The lawmakers accomplished this by reinstating some parts of the territory's Uniform Probate law. If approved, the transferring of bank accounts and investments designated to heirs after the holder dies would become less complicated.
- A measure [sponsored by Senator Novelle Francis](#) that gives children whose fathers failed to support them the right to seek inheritance when the fathers die through DNA testing.
- Legislation that treats non-resident employees by companies in the territory that receives tax breaks as such only for the duration of those tax breaks.
- Another that creates a new licensing board for professional counselors and professional fiber optic installers.
- A Senator Neville James-sponsored measure that appropriates \$35,000 from the Casino Revenue Fund to match a USDA grant that will support farm-to-school education training.
- A resolution honoring Stanley Jacobs, legendary frontman of Stanley and the Ten Sleepless Knights.
- A bill sponsored by Senator Justin Harrigan, Sr. that mandates that businesses post prominently their occupancy levels, which would be determined by the VI Fire Service's director.
- And legislation appropriating \$90,000 from the Community Facilities Trust Fund to renovate the Horace Clark Ballpark situated at the Arthur A. Richards Jr. High School on St. Croix. The funds kept in the trust are a small percentage of federal alcohol excise taxes collected from the territory's rum producers.

Feature Image: Government House, St. Thomas.

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