

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bill Giving Gov't Employees Paid Leave To Donate Blood Clears Hurdle

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ST. CROIX -- A bill sponsored by Senator Kurt Vialet that gives government employees paid leave to donate blood made it through the Committee on Rules and Judiciary on Thursday at the Fritz E. Lawaetz Legislative Hall. Two other measures won the committee's approval as well: one sponsored by Senator Sammuel Sanes that increases the sentence for using the identity of a minor or senior to 15 years, and another measure sponsored by Senator Janette Millin Young mandating that government agencies include within their budgets a copy of the federal funds they apply for.

"I saw this measure as being very important to the people of the Virgin Islands," said Mr. Vialet of [bill no. 31-0188](#). "After visiting both hospitals, I realized that we are spending a

tremendous amount of money purchasing blood from Puerto Rico or the mainland for the residents of these islands. I also realized, because of a personal incident, the hardship of receiving blood. Sometimes we have patients that are waiting 2, 3, 4 days because there's not an ample supply of blood on the island."

Mr. Violet said the territory was spending over \$300,000 between the Juan F. Luis and Roy Lester Schneider hospitals to import blood. Part of the problem, he said, was that residents were not donating blood as often as they should. So he decided to create an incentive that would increase donations, "because most of the times individuals were saying that they just don't have the time during the regular day."

Although the measure received support from senators who were present, Committee Chairman Senator Kenneth Gittens said he was not comfortable with providing incentives "to save lives", even as he understood the importance of the measure.

"Do we really need an incentive to save a life?" he asked. "If we continue to provide these types of incentives to give time off from employment to go do different things, eventually there will be no time in the day for them to perform their duties. And in looking at public employment -- meaning government -- government is the people, and government is the entity that provides services to the people of our community. And if we continue to provide these incentives for people to be away from their desks, and to be away from their duties and responsibilities, then we're going to incentivize ourselves away from our responsibilities."

Mr. Gittens' concerns, however, were allayed after he was assured that a verification process would be put in place to discourage abuse.

Speaking to his bill, ([no. 31-0037](#)) which was co-sponsored by Senator Jean Forde, Mr. Sanes said the measure would help deter identity theft by not only increasing the minimum sentence to 15 years, but also making it an aggravated offense to steal a minor or senior's identity.

"Sometimes it takes years for someone to identify that their identity has been stolen," Mr. Sanes said, making special mention of minors who fall prey to the scheme. "Remember, when a child is 5, 7 or 8 years old, he has to wait almost ten years or until they apply, or their parents apply for any type of assistance requiring their Social Security number."

Voting in favor of all three measures were Senators Novelle Francis, Gittens, Millin Young and Justin Harrigan. Committee members Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly, Neville James and Jean Forde were absent. The bill will be forwarded to the full Senate for its ratification or rejection.