

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bills Placing Onus Of Road Repairs On Those Who Caused Damage Clears Another Hurdle

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ST. THOMAS -- A Sen. Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly bill that places the onus of repairing roads in the territory on those who damage them, cleared the Committee on Rules and Judiciary on Thursday.

The first bill, [31-0157](#), aims to strengthen existing laws that places responsibility of roads damaged by heavy equipment on the owners of said equipment, and shares a \$500 fine between the Virgin Islands Police Department and the Department of Public Works, the idea being to encourage the VIPD to enforce the measure as it too would benefit financially.

Sen. Rivera-O'Reilly used the construction of the Virgin Islands National Guard (VING) complex in Estate Bethlehem as one of the reasons behind the measures. According to the senator, VING hired an off-island contractor to perform work on the complex, and in turn the off-island subcontracted the job to a local company, whose equipment badly damaged the Estate Bethlehem road.

“Just for clarity, the measure that we are dealing with deals uniquely and specifically with heavy equipment,” Mrs. O'Reilly said. “To the extent that the person is identified and fined, the police department would issue a citation, then it becomes the duty of Public Works to gather the costs of the repair, and to charge the person accordingly.”

Public Works Commissioner Gustav James, present for the hearing held at a Fritz E. Lawaetz Legislative Hall in Frederiksted in October, 2015, when the measure was heard by the Committee on Government Services, Consumer and Veterans Affairs, agreed with the measure, and said whenever he sees heavy equipment on the territory's roads with steel tracks, he deems it a violation of local law.

Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly said road repair laws must be enforced so as to limit damage when reconstruction occurs. But Mr. James said his intent is to make sure that the territory's roads are built to withstand heavy equipment instead of restricting them altogether.

Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly also introduced bill [No. 31-0163](#), another measure dealing with fines for damaged roads in the territory, stating that while the first measure changed the law for damages caused by heavy equipment, 31-0163 deals with damages aside from heavy machinery.

The bills were approved without opposition by the committee, with Senators Novelle James, Kenneth Gittens, Rivera-O'Reilly, Janette Millin Young and Jean Forde voting in the affirmative. Senators Neville James and Justin Harrigan were absent.

Feature Image: Truck carrying backhoe on the Sion Hill road.

Image Credit: VIC.