

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Quick Note: Bill Adding Up To Five Years For Crimes Committed While Wearing Body Armor Clears Hurdle

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ST. THOMAS -- Members of the Committee on Rules and Judiciary on Thursday favorably forwarded to the full Senate a bill sponsored by Senator Justin Harrigan, adding up to five years to sentences for crimes committed while wearing body armor. The bill, [no. 31-0159](#), amends Virgin Islands Code chapter 113 to prohibit the possession of body armor while committing a criminal act.

It was unanimously approved by the Rules Committee, chaired by Senator Kenneth Gittens, at the Earl B. Ottley Legislative Hall here, but senators deferred on its contents, including some who supported adding a mandatory sentence, and others who ardently supposed the idea.

Senator Neville James said too much power was being placed in the hands of judges in regards to sentencing, and advocated for minimum sentence language. But Senators Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly and Janette Millin Young opposed the suggestion, with Mrs. O'Reilly pointing to the U.S. mainland where state legislators are moving away from mandatory sentences.

"All across the country, legislatures are moving away from minimum mandatory sentences," she said. Mrs. O'Reilly said that judges and the American Bar Association have pled with policy makers to leave the discretion of sentencing in the hands of judges. "I will support the bill as it is and not support an amendment," she assured.

All Rules Committee [members](#) were present.