

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Sen. Francis Proposes Legislation to Increase Mooring Fees

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ST. CROIX -- Senator Novelle Francis on Wednesday announced that he is proposing legislation that would support greater enforcement of the territory's waters by increasing mooring fees. The measure is scheduled to be heard before the Committee on Government Services, Consumer and Veterans' Affairs today.

According to the release, Mr. Francis worked closely with the Department of Planning and Natural Resources on the bill. Presently, all boats, regardless of type of use, pay the same \$5 per foot. Mr. Francis' bill would establish fees up to \$20 per foot based on the length of the vessel and type of use. It also establishes vessel anchoring fees, which do not exceed \$4 per foot. He intends for revenues from the fee increase to be dedicated to

strengthening DPNR's marine enforcement activities. "The fact that we are surrounded by water makes it easier for the criminal element to bring guns, drugs and other contraband into the territory," he said. "Our marine units must have the tools and resources needed to patrol our waters and enforce local laws."

In crafting the legislation, Mr. Francis also considered the environmental and visual impact of boats anchored in the territory's waters.

"There are many boats that have been anchored in the same spot for months, yet are paying a minimal fee. Boats that appear to be abandoned are rapidly become eyesores. In addition, some boats also have an environmental impact from sewage, as well as the impact to coral and marine life," he said.

The freshman Democrat says the increase in mooring fees is long overdue.

"These fees have not been revised for over twenty years. In that time, there has become a greater need to police our marine traffic and waters and ensure that we are doing everything we can to restrict the flow of contraband into the territory. I am hopeful that the enforcement capabilities of the Department of Planning and Natural Resources will be strengthened by this legislation."

Feature Image: A Consortium photographer snaps a shot from the Christiansted Bypass, overlooking Gallows Bay.