

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mooring Fees Increase Bill Overcomes First Hurdle

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ST. THOMAS -- A bill sponsored by Senator Novelle Francis, Jr., which would increase mooring fees, was successfully voted out of the Committee on Government Services, Consumer and Veterans Affairs at a Thursday hearing in the Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall.

Bill 31-0333 received favorable votes from six members of the committee and is now headed to the Rules and Judiciary Committee for further vetting.

Mr. Francis thanked his colleagues for their support of the bill, which would direct revenue collected from mooring fees to marine enforcement.

"I appreciate that my colleagues recognized the critical need to strengthen the Department of Planning and Natural Resources enforcement abilities," he said. "For more than twenty years, the need for enforcement has grown, while the fees charged that would support these efforts has remained stagnant."

Mooring fees have remained unchanged since 1990 at \$5 per foot, regardless of the type of craft or use.

But the legislation saw opposition from Commodore Dan Nicolosi, who was not present at the hearing but contended through written testimony read by Greer Scholes, manager of the St. Thomas Yacht Club, that the Department of Planning and Natural Resources does not maintain mooring and anchorages. Instead, Mr. Nicolosi said, the maintenance is handled by the yacht club.

"There is no justification for any increase in the fees. No services are provided by DPNR Enforcement to the marine community," wrote Mr. Nicolosi. "The DPNR Enforcement division is more than adequately funded by the 'Federal Boating Safety Grant. The total of these grants is published on the USCG web page. Since 1999 DPNR has received almost \$6 million to support boating activities."

The bill was nonetheless endorsed by D.P.N.R. Commissioner Dawn Henry, contending that the federal grant of \$400,000 annually is consumed by federal priorities, and that the day-to-day operational costs of the marine division had increased. Ms. Henry said proceeds gained from the passage of the bill would help hire and train marine enforcement officers, purchase fuel and maintain vessels used for marine enforcement.

Mr. Scholes agreed that the fees could see an increase, especially since the current amount has remained unchanged since 1990, but "we are concerned we may see a decrease in moorings," Mr. Scholes went on, advocating for an incremental increase instead of a 100 percent hike.

The bill, seen [here](#), would charge \$10 per foot per month for pleasure craft; \$20 per foot for commercial craft, and \$15 for live-aboard craft.

[Read the original document](#)

With yesterday's hurdle behind him, Mr. Francis says he's looking forward to the next steps of the legislative process.

"Today's spirited discussion shows that there are strong opinions about this bill. Ultimately, it boils down to the needs of the greater community, all of whom benefit from greater marine policing and enforcement of our local laws," he said.

The freshman Democrat said Puerto Rico in January increased its own mooring fee to \$26 per foot monthly.

Feature Image: Yacht Haven Grande, St. Thomas.

Image Credit: Show Management, Florida.

