

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Rules Committee Approves Mooring, Health-Related Bills

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ST. CROIX -- The Committee on Rules and Judiciary on Thursday approved one bill that increases mooring fees and four other health-related measures.

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

During a [May 19 hearing](#) in the Committee on Government Services, Consumer and Veterans Affairs, 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. Nicolos 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.

The committee, chaired by Senator Kenneth Gittens, also approved the following measures:

[Bill No. 31-0305](#) -- Requires the Virgin Islands Board of Medical Examiners, Board of Dental Examiners, Board of Nurse Licensure, Board of Pharmacy, Board of Optometrical Examiners, Board of Physical Therapy, Board of Chiropractic Examiners, Board of Podiatry Examiners, Board of Psychology Examiners, Board of Veterinary Medicine and Board of Naturopathic Physicians to perform criminal background checks on applicants seeking professional licenses. It also requires the Board of Nurse Licensure to regulate certified nursing assistants and to make technical amendments.

[Bill No. 31-0324](#) -- Expands the authority of the Virgin Islands Board of Medical Examiners, giving the board more leeway to grant special licenses to physicians.

[Bill No. 31-0005](#) -- Originally called an "Act creating the Virgin Islands Comprehensive Crime and Public Health Task Force," was amended by Senator Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly, the measure's sponsor, to be a study on public health.

[Bill No. 31-0294](#) -- Requires health care providers who are employed by the Government of the Virgin Islands, are engaged in private practice and receive financial assistance toward the payment of medical malpractice insurance premiums, to accept Medicare and Medicaid.

In addition, the measure authorizes the territory's Dept. of Health commissioner to issue a fine of \$10,000 for first violation, followed by termination of financial assistance for malpractice and ensuing infractions.

All the measures were unanimously approved in the Rules Committee and forwarded to the full Senate for a final vote.

