

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Submits Bill Aimed At Speeding Up Pending Court Trials

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ST. CROIX -- On the heels of Governor Kenneth Mapp's [announcement](#) that he had removed Judge Michael Dunston as presiding judge of the Superior Court and replaced him with Judge Harold Willocks, Mr. Mapp submitted a proposed bill to implement and provide for the speedy trial of persons charged with criminal offenses in the U.S. Virgin Islands, Government House made known via press release late Friday.

The measure, titled the "Virgin Islands Speedy Trial Act", is intended to strike a balance between protecting the rights of those charged with criminal offenses and the interest of the community in holding the judicial branch accountable for the effective and efficient administration of justice, according to the release. Mr. Mapp said at a press conference

this morning that the Superior Court "remains lethargic, non-functioning and simply, in 2016, a paper operation."

"It is disheartening that individuals can be charged with crimes, but have to wait substantially long periods before having their day in court. In some cases, there are detainees who have, and continue to wait as long as three years for their trial on charges not even as egregious as murder. There is nothing speedy about a criminal trial process that takes multiple years to resolve," Mr. Mapp said in his transmittal letter to Senate President Neville James.

The territory's leader also pointed to the expense and strain on government resources associated with holding detainees awaiting trial: "Such delays in turn costs the government substantial monetary resources to house, feed, and provide medical services to persons who have not been convicted of any crime.

"Enacting a speedy trial act in the territory, like that at the federal level and most states, will ensure accountability of each level of the criminal justice system," Mr. Mapp concluded.