

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Noise Reduction Bill Overcomes First Hurdle; Its Author, Sen. Francis, Treading Carefully

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ST. CROIX -- A noise reduction bill that its author, Senator Novelle Francis, told this publication on Friday is aimed at finding a balance in the community as it relates to loud music, was the recipient of [a lot of backlash](#) even before it was heard, following [a Consortium story](#) simply announcing the hearing, which took place Friday at the Fritz E. Lawaetz Legislative Hall in Frederiksted.

The measure, seen [here](#), was unanimously voted out of the Committee on Homeland Security, Public Safety and Justice, chaired by Mr. Francis, with all committee members -- bar Senator Kenneth Gittens, who was absent at the time of voting -- giving the nod of approval. It calls for noise to be controlled in cars and motorcycles, and sets decibel

levels that governs distances at which business establishments could fall into violation and, if proven to be indeed negligent, fined.

There were many testifiers at yesterday's hearing, including Delroy Richards Sr., V.I.P.D. commissioner, and Devin Carrington, Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs commissioner.

Melody Rames, president of the Frederiksted Economic Development Association (F.E.D.A.), was also present. She gave a strong argument in favor of the measure, highlighting the numerous complaints of business owners, who say they've lost dollars because of loud music blasting in Frederiksted in the wee hours.

Ms. Rames mentioned Casa Del Oro, a guesthouse located on Prince Street, Frederiksted, stating that the owners' biggest concern "is the noise level emanating from the American Legion Hall where functions that are held there are apparently allowed to blast music at high volumes until the early hours of the morning."

Casa Del Oro owners Havis and Nina Tatum, according to Ms. Rames, contend that the music is so loud that it sometimes rattle items in their apartments; negative reviews have led to the loss of money.

"Most recently a couple from Denmark cancelled a \$2,000 week stay at their establishment because of negative comments on the internet regarding the noise levels on such sites as TripAdvisor and Yelp," Ms. Rames said.

Ms. Rames also conveyed the concerns of residents who live near Rainbow Beach in the Prosperity area, who said that while the music emanating from Rhythms at Rainbow has improved because the establishment shutters between 8:00 p.m.- 9:00 p.m., the loud beach parties that last sometimes until 1:00 a.m. and 2:00 a.m., remain an issue.

Cars with outsize speakers blaring music laced with profanity was also highlighted as an issue by F.E.D.A., as well as motorcycles that zoom through the town with law-breaking speeds, which Ms. Rames said was also seen as a safety concern.

But the measure is viewed by many as a push by members of the community who are not used to the culture of the Virgin Islands, and more broadly the Caribbean. They contended that the bill, if approved, could damper the entertainment industry and make less lively towns already in need of rejuvenation. It's a concern that Mr. Francis became keenly aware of following the backlash, and has hinted that he might as well leave the measure as is. (There was a noise pollution bill already in place, with standards that's never been enforced. Mr. Francis' measure is aimed at not only amending the current law, but ensuring enforcement).

And he said that the new measure included provisions that favored businesses, including a provision ostensibly loosening noise regulations by reducing the distance nightclubs must be from churches, residences and schools from 500 feet to 100 feet. There was also a provision in the new measure to remove soundproofing as part of the code of building nightclubs since there would be a lower decibel required in the new law. However, both provisions were objected by testifiers and were left as is -- leaving soundproofing and the 500 feet distance in place.

"So while they talk about that this measure was being hard, it was totally the opposite," Mr. Francis said. "Some instances we were disallowing the need for soundproofing. However, it's recommended that we do maintain the soundproofing of the measure."

The bill has been forwarded to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary, chaired by Mr. Gittens. A hearing date has not been set.

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