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# AARP Lauds Approval of Bill Adding Protections to Older Virgin Islanders Against Financial Exploitation

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Older Virgin Islanders now have more protections following the passage and subsequent approval by Governor Albert Bryan of a bill that seeks to protect the elderly community from financial exploitation.

In a recently issued release, AARP, a staunch advocate of the measure and other important causes affecting the territory's older population, praised the legislation's approval. The bill was sponsored by Senator Allison DeGazon and was unanimously passed by the Senate and signed into law by Governor Bryan on July 27.

“People have the right to live free from all forms of abuse. I am pleased the Virgin Islands has a stronger law to combat financial exploitation and provide survivors with a sense of security that their assets are protected”, said Troy de Chabert-Schuster, AARP Virgin Islands State Director.

Financial exploitation can cause injuries far beyond the pocketbook, AARP said. This abuse frequently affects an older adult’s physical and emotional health. The government in many instances finds itself trying to pick up the pieces. Yet, efforts to prevent this type of abuse through the passage of stricter laws, like Bill No 33-0077, is often cost neutral, according to the nonprofit. The enactment of stronger safeguards against financial exploitation of older Virgin Islanders is a win for the government, older adults and their families.

"AARP Virgin Islands remains committed to working on behalf of its members to continue efforts to combat all forms of elder abuse," said the organization. "We, alongside lawmakers and other partners, are developing a comprehensive elder abuse law to prevent, detect, and prosecute all forms of abuse - physical, psychological, and financial. The intent, among other things, is to provide additional safeguards for older adults and individuals with disabilities and increase criminal penalties for people who commit all forms of abuse. AARP Virgin Islands stand ready to collaborate on this and other initiatives that continue to empower older adults to live their lives as they chose and free from abuse."

Elder abuse, like many forms of domestic abuse, is an often hidden phenomenon that affects hundreds of thousands of older Americans. Financial exploitation is the most prevalent form of this type of abuse. In fact, 1 out of 5 older adults experience financial exploitation and on average loses \$120,000, the AARP said.

In fact, the passage of this new law will provide additional protections for older Virgin Islanders from perpetrators intent on causing financial harm to an older adult. It also allows the Virgin Islands Department of Human Services Adult Protective Section to seek assistance from local law enforcement when investigating reports of suspected financial exploitation.