

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Myron Jackson Will Seek Override Of Vetoed Curator And Related Committee Bill

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ST. THOMAS -- Senate President Myron Jackson said on Friday that he plans to seek an override of Governor Kenneth Mapp's recent veto of Bill No. 32-0024, which sought to provide for a curator and a committee to be responsible for the fine and decorative arts of Government Houses throughout the Virgin Islands. According to Mr. Jackson, the legislation aims to create accountability for the acquisition, removal, care and preservation, and disposal of items in the collection.

The governor announced earlier this week that he had already taken steps to fulfill the legislation's intent by hiring a chief conservator who works with the commissioner of the Department of Planning and Natural Resources. He also stated that having a curator

report to an eight-person committee as mandated in the bill, would cause “confusion and administrative delays.” Mr. Jackson, however, said he was undeterred from advancing the proposed measure, which he said would give necessary and careful oversight to the responsibility.

“The governor’s actions just amplify the need for implementing a protocol for the antiquities housed under the roofs of government houses,” Mr. Jackson said. “My bill is a policy many state governments have implemented. After visiting the White House curator during the Obama administration, it was clear that we were antiquated with how we care for and manage our resources. This is the third natural disaster where the care and management of art and treasures have been compromised. Now is the opportune time to implement the right policies. An override will be introduced.”

On Thursday, Government House made known that the governor announced the appointment of the chief conservator, Julio Encarnacion, on Tuesday in a letter to Mr. Jackson, and Mr. Encarnacion officially assumed his duties on April 16. In his veto correspondence, the governor said steps had already been taken to fulfill the tasks that the proposed legislation suggested.

“The newly hired chief conservator will work with the commissioner of the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, who is the statutory historic preservation officer of the territory, to ensure the care and custody of our territory’s cultural resources, arts and artifacts in the executive branch’s possession,” Mr. Mapp said.

The governor’s veto is the latest development following public outcry over the unattended state of valuable china, mahogany furniture, and other artifacts left at Government House on St. Thomas after Hurricanes Irma and Maria, Mr. Jackson said.

Mr. Encarnacion, known to many in the Virgin Islands as “The Native Son”, said he started collecting local artifacts as a child. “I have independently curated and conserved my own private collection and a great amount has been on display over the past year,” he said.

A professional member of the American Alliance of Museums, Mr. Encarnacion returned to St. Croix last year from studies in Boca Raton to exhibit his collection at Government House during the Virgin Islands Centennial Transfer events. His Centennial commemoration efforts included a presentation at the John H. Woodson Jr. High School, where he became inspired by the students’ enthusiasm, Government House said.

“My goal has always been to inform the community about the importance of preserving and promoting our culture and history through historical artifacts,” Mr. Encarnacion said. “I have visited schools to teach students about preservation and have participated in many exhibitions.” He feels he will help young people better understand their history by being a full-time ambassador for cultural preservation.”

Mr. Jackson said he has been working for years to pass legislation to protect antiques and artwork. The language in Bill No. 32-0024, was partially developed from Mr. Jackson’s consultation with a curator from the White House in Washington, D.C., according to Mr. Jackson’s office.