

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bill To Create Law Aimed At Protecting Native Trees Passes First Hurdle

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A measure sponsored by Senate President Myron Jackson that seeks to better protect local trees was approved on Monday by members of the Committee on Government Affairs, Veterans, Energy and Environmental Protection -- chaired by Senator Sammuel Sanes -- and forwarded to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary.

The legislation, Bill No. 32-0062, is an Act amending the Virgin Islands Code by adding a chapter establishing what is being called the Community and Heritage Tree Law of the Virgin Islands.

Mr. Jackson said during the hearing held at the Cardiac Center's conference room on St. Croix, that the bill was birthed to help set clear guidelines relative to the handling of native trees. And he said a line of communication needed to be established with the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority, which constantly makes decisions affecting these trees.

The bill also creates what has been named The Virgin Islands Tree Board, whose role will be to provide a process and mechanism by which hazardous public trees can be pruned or removed, if necessary, and to give the public a forum in which to voice their opinions on tree removal, among other responsibilities, [seen here in the bill](#).

Director of Transmission and Distribution at WAPA, Neil Vantepool, who testified on behalf of WAPA Executive Director Lawrence Kupfer, said the authority's efforts to keep trees and bushes away from its power lines and facilities is an ongoing and costly undertaking. He said the measure's provision that allows WAPA crews to prune or remove trees to maintain properly functioning public infrastructure with the assessment of a certified arborist, is aligned with the authority's present goal. Mr. Vanterpool added that the bill's requirement that trimming native trees be done in accordance with the American National Standards Institute for Tree Trimming and Right of Way Clearance, aligned with the authority's own guidelines.

"WAPA supports [the bill's] aim to preserve and maintain the health and heritage of the trees that gives this territory its unique and distinct character," Mr. Vanterpool said.

"The bill is so long overdue; the Virgin Islands is the last remaining U.S. state or territory without a tree ordinance," said Senator Novelle Francis.

Members present at the Monday hearing were Senators Sanes, Tregenza Roach, Mavin Blyden, Alicia Hansen and Janette Millin Young. Mr. Jackson, a non-committee member, was also present to defend his measure.