

The Virgin Islands Consortium

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Maxiene K. Cabo **December 10, 2020**



The Committee on Rules and Judiciary assembled on Thursday at the Earle B. Ottley Legislative Chambers to consider numerous nominees and several measures, including Bill No. 33-0220.

Bill No. 33-0220 is an Act providing for the construction of ramps or walkways at least two beaches in each island district that would allow persons with disabilities access to the beaches. Sen. Steven Payne, one of the Bill's sponsors, said, "to often the plights of the

disable go unnoticed in our community whether its employment opportunities, housing, or being able to traverse safely on our streets or roadways; and yes, even when it comes to recreational activities.”

Julien Henley Sr., Territorial Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Coordinator for the Government of the Virgin Islands, said, “its every citizen’s right to have access to our beautiful beaches in these U.S. Virgin Islands.” Mr. Henley told lawmakers that before any construction can begin on any of the qualified beaches, a thorough assessment from its parking lot, to its amenities, to its safe access to the water must be conducted. “Parking requirements start with clear signage for the designated parking space on a firm and leveled ground, with reasonable proximity to the entrance of the beach,” said Mr. Henley; he added that there must be an access aisle adjacent to the parking spot that is wide enough to ensure a person using a mobility device can safely disembark from their parked vehicle. There must also be an accessible route.

According to Mr. Henley’s testimony, a feasible, accessible route must be at least 5-feet wide and able to accommodate two-way traffic; and landings are required at the end of all accessible ramps or routes that are not on leveled ground. Besides the parking and routing requirements, further advises that the beaches should have tables constructed with an extension of 24 inches on at least one end of each wooden picnic table installed. “This will effectively allow persons in a mobility device to join other seated members and participate in whatever group activity is at hand, Mr. Henley said.

Mr. Henley told committee members that he completed a walkthrough of several beaches on St. Thomas for the accessible beach mat project, and different concerns arose. For instance, while both Magen’s Bay and Smith Bay beaches have accessible restrooms, their parking spaces are on sand or gravel, making traversing extremely difficult. Moreover, on Coki Point Beach, parking has also been deemed an issue; however, according to Mr. Henley, it will also be addressed. “While Coki Point has an accessible restroom and route to the water, a landing at the end of the route is needed to allow persons to transfer into the accessible device that will be used to enter the water,” as stated by Mr. Henley.

On the island of St. Croix, Fort Frederick is faced with somewhat unique accessibility challenges, such as rocks, persistent sea urchins, and much more. But despite the obstacles on St. Coix, as mentioned by Mr. Henley in his testimony, Cramer Park was revealed to be a top candidate for accessibility. However, the restroom is inaccessible, and accessible parking and accessible routes still need to be established. Mr. Henley added that a landing is also required at the end of the accessible route to the water for an individual to transfer between mobile devices safely.

While beaches on each island have their own flaws, Mr. Henley explained, “it is crucial to first identify and then eradicate any barriers—whether obvious or implicit—that contribute to denying any citizen of their right to a complete life in this territory.” He added, “these improvements will also become an attraction for our tourism product. It is very important for this improvement to be shared with our hotels as they book guests with mobility challenges who can enjoy this new commodity.”

As amended, Bill No. 33-0220 was favorably approved by the committee and would be sent to the full body for further consideration.

The following measures and nominees were also approved by lawmakers and will be sent to the full body for further deliberation.

Marion L. Wilson – Virgin Islands Board of Nurse Licensure Licensed Practical Nurse, District of St. Croix

Tanicia S. Penn – Virgin Islands Board of Nurse Licensure Registered Nurse with Varied Specialization

Arnelle Lewis-Comissiong – Virgin Islands Board of Nurse Licensure Registered Nurse with Varied Specialization

Juliette Petty – Virgin Islands Board of Nurse Licensure Voting Lay Person, District of St. Thomas/St. John

E. Aracelis Francis, Ph.D. – Virgin Islands Board of Social Work Licensure District of St. Thomas/St. John

Juliette M. Millin – Virgin Islands Board of Social Work Licensure District of St. Thomas/St. John

Andre' T. Dorsey – Government Employees Retirement System Board of Trustees District of St. Thomas/St. John

Bill No. 33-0004 – As amended an Act amending the Virgin Islands Code title 3, chapter 5 adding subchapter III to enact The Virgin Islands Public Art Program Act requiring one percent of total capital improvement project costs to be expended for works of art placed in government buildings (Sponsored by Senator Myron D. Jackson)

Bill No. 33-0449 – As amended a bill amending Title 17 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 15 relating to the Virgin Islands Higher Education Scholarship Program to extend eligibility for scholarships to students in the Dual Credit Program (Sponsored by Senator Janelle K. Sarauw, Senator Kurt A. Vialet)

Bill No. 33-0355 - An Act amending Title 11 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 23, relating to the Small Business Development Agency by adding a section 1266 to provide an income tax deduction to small businesses that employ persons with disabilities (Sponsored by Senator Stedmann Hodge, Jr.)

Bill No. 33-0431 A Resolution honoring and commending Rashawn Ross for his outstanding achievements and contributions in the field of music (Sponsored by Senator Myron D. Jackson)

Bill No. 33-0440 A Resolution commemorating the 100 Year Anniversary of the Charlotte Amalie High School on St Thomas, Virgin Islands (1920-2020) (Sponsored by Senator Myron D. Jackson; CoSponsored by Senator Donna Frett-Gregory)

Bill No. 33-0438 An Act making an appropriation of \$75,000 from the Centennial Special Fund to the Department of Education for the Charlotte Amalie High School's centennial activities (Sponsored by Senator Donna Frett-Gregory)

Bill No. 33-0432 - An Act honoring and commending Orville Edward Kean, Ph.D. for his contributions to the University of the Virgin Islands and the Virgin Islands Community by renaming the University of the Virgin Islands' Sports and Fitness Center the "Orville Kean Sports and Fitness Center" (Sponsored by Senator Myron D. Jackson)

Bill No. 33-0425- An Act renaming the South Side Road on St. John "The Rudolph A. 'Pimpy' Thomas, Jr. Road" (Sponsored by Senator Stedmann Hodge, Jr.)

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