

Bill Posthumously Honoring Fallen Soldiers Who Died While Serving in U.S. Armed Forces Moves Forward

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Members of the Committee on Culture, Historic Preservation, and Aging, chaired by Sen. Myron Jackson, convened in a meeting at the Cleone Henrietta Creque Legislative Conference Room on Friday, and voted favorably for a bill posthumously honoring fallen soldiers who lost their lives while serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. Lawmakers were also updated on the status of senior services on St. John, as well as the award-winning documentary on the 2017 hurricanes by filmmaker Peter Bailey, “Unbreakable Virgin Islands.” The contributions of the late newspaper founder, journalist, author, poet, and artist J. Antonio Jarvis were also remembered on the 118th anniversary of his birth.

The meeting opened with a tribute in honor of the 1733 St. John Revolution. Virgin Islands Freedom Fighters Day is recognized annually on November 23rd. It is symbolic of the revolution organized revolt by Akwamu slaves on St. John that started on November 23, 1733 and continued for several months. Participants of Friday's presentation were conch shell blower Emmanuel Boyd, drummer Eddie Bruce, and community activist and scholar Dr. Gilbert Sprauve.

Upon conclusion of the tribute, policymakers voted and approved Bill No. 33-0127 - An Act posthumously honoring and commending the men and women who lost their lives while serving in the United States Armed Forces, naming the roundabout road circle located in downtown Cruz Bay, St. John, "The Veterans Circle," and appropriating \$20,000 to the Virgin Islands Council on the Arts to commission a monument in memory of the veterans.

Sponsor of the bill, Sen. Athneil Thomas stated that moving forward it is important to recognize veterans and their service throughout the territory. Patrick Farrell, director of the Virgin Islands Office of Veterans Affairs said, "Far too long the veterans of St. John have been without this type of recognition. If this area is to be named in honor of service members that paid with the ultimate sacrifice, then it should be rightfully treated as sacred grounds."

Regarding the appropriation of funds, Tasida Kelch, executive director of the Virgin Islands Council of the Arts, suggested that allocating monies to the Department of Sports, Parks, and Recreation instead of the V.I. Council of the Arts is best due to the continuous maintenance and upkeep of the monument.

Later on the agenda, Michal Rhymer-Brown, assistant commissioner of the V.I. Department of Human Services, shared an overview of the Senior Centers, Home Care, and Housing/Services offered to seniors on St. John.

Some of the challenges facing the Homemaker Services Program on St. John are the need to recruit and hire additional staff, the influx of senior citizens' requests for more services, and the rising demand for home care services. Furthermore, Mr. Rhymer-Brown noted that post-hurricanes Irma and Maria the Adrian Senior Center sustained severe damages.

The V.I. Housing Authority has placed a bid to reconstruct and repair the center with an expectation to reopen by 2020. Despite challenges, D.H.S has provided services for twenty-eight seniors on St. John, to include providing meals prepared with the guidelines of the Nutrition Program. Additionally, monies from the Senior Citizens Center Revolving Fund will be re-directed to purchase a 2020 SUV to transport seniors from their homes to the Senior Center. Mr. Rhymer-Brown mentioned that some of the goals and initiatives are to fill vacant positions for the Homemaker program, launch media campaigns to create community awareness, and update policies and procedures.

