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Funding to Expand Pier in Frederiksted Among Seven Bills Approved in Finance Committee

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Frederiksted Pier By. ERNICE GILBERT FOR VI CONSORTIUM

Seven bills heard in the Committee on Finance Friday were forwarded to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary for further vetting. Among them a measure aimed at immediately collecting taxes on fuel brought into the territory, restoration projects on St. Croix and payment of an outstanding settlement.

[Bill 34-0004](#), sponsored by Senate President Donna Frett-Gregory, seeks to amend language in Virgin Islands Code to ascertain that funds received from fuel arriving into the USVI are collected immediately. A portion of the bill reads, “The intent of this bill is to provide a more accurate account of the gasoline imported into the territory and to ensure that all relevant taxes are

immediately and properly collected upon the fuel entering the territory.”

[Bill 34-0003](#), also sponsored by Ms. Frett- Gregory, would reduce the time period on building applications by requiring the Department of Planning and Natural Resources to provide a notice to the applicant within 5 days of receipt. It would also reduce the current decision-making window of 60 days to 45 for commercial businesses, and from 45 days to 30 for residential properties. The measure would direct three percent of all building permit fees to be deposited into DPNR's Reclamation Fund to maintain and upgrade the electronic permitting system.

During testimony, D.P.N.R. Commissioner Jean-Pierre Oriol said, “As part of our initial contract, the annual fees associated with the maintenance of the e-permitting system is about \$38,000.00. In addition, the subscription for the mobile application of our e-permitting system is about \$5000 per year for every 10 users. The 3 percent to be designated will allow for DPNR to maintain cloud space and maintain customer support for those who will be using the system when implemented.”

[Bill 34-0013](#) was sent to the Senate by Governor Albert Bryan and would appropriate “\$2,050,000 from the St. Croix Capital Improvement Fund for replacement of the existing, deteriorated tender landing pier and repairs at the Ann E. Abramson Marine Terminal in Frederiksted, St. Croix.”

According V.I. Port Authority Assistant Director Damian Cartwright, who is also the director of engineering at VIPA, the authority plans to replace the existing terminal with a new, 80-foot by 15-foot pier which is estimated to cost the appropriation the bill provides.

Ms. Frett-Gregory pledged her full support. “The Ann E. Abramson Marine Terminal on St. Croix is pivotal to tourism on the island of St. Croix and to the overall economy of the U.S. Virgin Islands,” she said. “Having a facility on St Croix where mega ships can call is indeed a necessity. I am certain that no one will disagree.”

She added that while cruise travel was temporarily on hold, the industry will eventually revive and the territory needs to be ready.

[Bill 34-0014](#), also sent to the Senate by Mr. Bryan, would appropriate “\$1.6 million from the Communities Facilities Trust Account for four community facilities projects on St Croix, Virgin Islands. The projects included in this bill are the pier at King’s Alley Hotel, the dock at Gallows Bay Marine Facility, and the roll-on/roll-off ramp at the Gordon A. Finch Molasses Pier.”

[Bill 34-0008](#), sponsored by Sen. Javon James, would appropriate “\$272,000 from the St. Croix Capital Improvement Fund for the renovation of the Police Athletic League Headquarters in Estate Whim, St. Croix.”

In a press release, Mr. James said the bill would benefit the Virgin Islands' youngest citizens, especially those in Frederiksted. “The youth must be given the opportunity to engage in positive outlets, improve relationships with police officers, and instill a newfound pride in the town of Frederiksted,” he said.

Sen. Marvin Blyden added, “It’s a no-brainer for me because \$272,000 for a preventive program when we see what is happening here in our territory with our young people, it’s automatic, it’s a good investment. Many times we spend hundreds of thousands of dollars for programs after the fact.”

Sen. Novelle Francis shared a similar message, “It’s better to educate than to incarcerate,” he said.

Sen. Franklin Johnson added to Mr. Blyden's point. "Earlier this week we had the Bureau of Corrections testifying and they talked about spending \$9 million a year holding prisoners on the mainland, and now we are fighting for \$272,000 to save our children. This just doesn't make sense at all."

[Bill 34-0020](#) is being sponsored by Senator Kurt Vialet and would appropriate "\$675,500 from the Community Facility Trust Fund to the Caribbean Drag Racing Association for restoration of facilities at the St. Croix MotorSports Complex, making an appropriation and for other related purposes."

The senators shared stories of how racing was impactful in their lives. They even had a competitive moment during the hearing, with Mr. Blyden stating that St. Thomas had the best engines, a point Mr. Vialet disputed.

Mr. Vialet said if done properly, the activity could provide a boost for Sports Tourism as teams would travel in large numbers at least once a week.

[Bill 34-0024](#), sponsored by Mr. Vialet and Ms. Frett-Gregory would appropriate "\$3,533,333.34 to the Department of Justice to partially pay the settlement agreement of Joe Harold Vanterpool d/b/a Vanterpool Enterprises v. Government of the Virgin Islands, \$2,000,000 to the Department of Labor for the payment of outstanding Worker's Compensation payments to medical providers, and \$40,000 to Clean Sweep Frederiksted for the beautification of the town of Frederiksted." The bill also amends Act No. 8411 to increase the Grand Total General Fund appropriations.