

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Senators Express Concern After B.I.T. Hires Man Who Pleaded Guilty to Identity Fraud as Chief Information Officer

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Zakee Abdur Rasheed By. VI LEGISLATURE TV

Senators during a Tuesday Committee on Finance hearing raised concerns regarding the hiring of Zakee Abdur Rasheed by the Bureau of Information Technology. Mr. Rasheed pleaded guilty to possession of an identification document with intent to defraud in 2019, and he's now serving as B.I.T.'s chief information security officer.

Mr. Rasheed [pleaded guilty in February 2019 to the charge](#) and [was sentenced to 3 months of home prohibition and 3 years of probation in September 2019.](#)

According to a plea agreement filed with the court, in or about 2012, Mr. Rasheed arranged to and did obtain a Virgin Islands driver's license in the name and date of birth for M. H. The license bore a photograph of Mr. Rasheed's wife, Ameena Ali. Mr. Rasheed intended that the false driver's license would be used to file an application for a United States passport for Ameena Ali in the name of M. H, according to court documents.

Senator Dwayne Degraff asked Rupert Ross, director of B.I.T., whether Mr. Rasheed was suited for the position based on his criminal history. Mr. Ross broke down Mr. Rasheed's job responsibilities, which he said include cyber security and risk management. "I think that he is well suited for that position," Mr. Ross stated.

The conversation was re-ignited later in the hearing by Senator Janelle Sarauw, who said, "I have much consternation for someone who pled guilty to identity fraud or theft and sitting here as the chief information officer. That has to be addressed."

She suggested that the director take drastic action. "Second chances I'm all for it but the scope of work with alignment with the offense can't continue, ok?"

Mr. Ross defended his employee by stating that Mr. Rasheed "has been responsible for single-handedly setting forth the path for cybersecurity, risk management for the government of the Virgin Islands. His efforts have garnered results that we have never seen before in government as it relates to risk management."

Senate President Donna Frett-Gregory sought to learn whether the strategy to hire Mr. Rasheed was similar to the federal government's hiring of hackers to work on cybersecurity. Mr. Ross said it wasn't.

Ms. Frett-Gregory followed up by asking, "What was the impetus for you to have that information and still move forward with the hire?" Mr. Ross said that of the candidates Mr. Rasheed was the "best prepared and had a bigger picture view than everyone else...it was an easy decision when we compared to all the other candidates."

Senator Kurt Violet casted doubt that a thorough background check was performed, to which Mr. Ross said, "In the process of hiring, he would have to provide for a background check and provide it to the Division of Personnel."