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# AARP V.I. Hails Law Granting Seniors and the Terminally Ill Preference in Civil Actions

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AARP in The Virgin Islands is hailing the passage of Bill No. 34-0076, now Act No. 8468, which amends the existing law to grant seniors and the terminally ill preference in civil actions.

The VI Legislature voted in favor of the Bill on August 3, and it was signed into law by Governor Albert Bryan on August 16.

AARP V.I. testified during the Committee on Rules and Judiciary hearing in favor of the measure. The organization thanked bill sponsors Senators Janelle K. Sarauw and Alma Heyliger Francis and Co-Sponsor Carla Joseph. "AARP also thanks the members of the VI Legislature and the governor for ensuring the bill became law," stated the release.

Bill No. 34-0076 is an amendment that will reduce the length of civil proceedings for vulnerable Virgin Islanders. The bill provides a mechanism to accelerate hearing a civil case of older and terminally ill citizens and lessens the impact of delayed judgment.

"All too often, older Virgin Islanders or terminally ill people must cope with the stress they endure as they wait to get their affairs settled in court," said AARP V.I. In addition, they struggle and live daily with the fear that they can pass away prematurely and before their case is settled."

The organization said the average length of time for the disposition for civil cases is more than 90 days, with many lasting 260 days or two and a half years before a judge hears the case. In the Virgin Islands, it can take over five years to resolve. "This time works against access to justice by seniors and the terminally ill," AARP VI said.

Before the pandemic, local courts struggled to get cases settled. The pandemic has caused proceedings to be put on hold, adding to the already existing backlog, which continues to rise.

"AARP constantly works to improve the lives of older adults and citizens of the VI territory," said Troy de Chabert-Schuster, AARP-VI state director. "Bill 34-0076 will serve to change the quality of life of the elderly and terminally ill. The Bill, which is now law gives back Virgin Islanders confidence in the VI legal system".

"The justice system must become more sensitive to the special needs of the aging and terminally ill as barriers continue to exist that interfere with the ability of the system to respond effectively", said Janelle Sarauw. "As civil cases continue to drag through the court system, this legislation aims to respond appropriately to the plight of the elderly and terminally ill."

AARP V.I. said it continues to work on behalf of AARP members and Virgin Islanders for bills that allow access to justice to be signed into law.