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Committee on Rules and Judiciary to Deliberate Increasing Retirement Age of Law Enforcement, Firefighters by 10 Years

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New law enforcement officers listen attentively during commencement exercises on St. Croix in Sept. 2021 By. VIPD

Extending the mandatory retirement age for law enforcement officers, firefighters and corrections officers by ten years are among bills that will be considered when the Committee on Rules and Judiciary meets Monday.

Bill 34-0099, an Act which is sponsored by Senators Dwayne DeGraff and Novelle E. Francis, will be seeking to amend title 3 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 25, sections 530 (g) and chapter 27, section 705(c).

The amendment will result in changing the mandatory retirement age of police officers, firefighters, and correction officers from 55 to 65.

During a Committee on Finance hearing mid-October, senators voiced their support for the measure, many of whom point to the current age of retirement for the affected gov't arms as a reason for staff shortages.

The V.I. Police Department, V.I. Fire Service and the Division of Personnel testified during the hearing and lent their support to the bill.

Assistant Personnel Director, Florine Audain-Hassell, said the bill "recognizes the need to implement additional strategies for the retention and recruitment of staff in agencies that continue to suffer from critical manpower shortages." She added, "Within the Division of Personnel it is our firm belief that ability, not age, should be the criteria used to obtain and retain a job." Mrs. Hassell further stated that a recent executive order signed by Governor Albert Bryan "did include a provision allowing police officers, firefighters, and prison guards to remain in service until age 65, effective immediately and so long as the order remains in effect."

Also supporting the bill during the October hearing was Police Commissioner Nominee Ray Martinez. "This measure assists us to resolve the manpower issue by extending the tour of duty for law enforcement professionals, allowing more officers to continue to serve past the initial standard age of retirement. On the other hand, the Government of the Virgin Islands (GVI) assumes a total cost of \$3,663,407.39 in salaries for those Officers, aged 55 to 63—a total of 47, who will soon be mandated to retire within the next year and immediately or impacted by the changes in the measure," he said.

He added, "If enacted, over the next five years, the VIPD will benefit as 11 eligible officers will be able to extend their tours of duty territory wide. If a relatively high percentage of officers were to choose to work longer under a higher mandatory retirement age, the impact may result in only a modest increase in the average rate of pay compared to keeping it at the current age of 55. Furthermore, it provides the opportunity for individuals to save longer for their retirement, and as so, helps to ensure that individuals will have financial security in later life."

Senator Novelle Francis, who said he is "certainly in support" of the bill, pointed to longevity in the U.S., which he deemed one of the outstanding "social transformations of the 21st century." He said individuals are living longer and therefore successful passage of the bill would represent a win-win outcome for all involved.

Life expectancy in the U.S. fell sharply last year as a result of the pandemic. [According to NBC News](#), U.S. men saw life expectancy fall by nearly 2.3 years, from about 76.7 to 74.4. Women lost more than 1.6 years of life expectancy, from about 81.8 to 80.2.

Shortly following the mid-October hearing, [senators blasted](#) a bill that sought to increase the age they would be eligible for retirement compensation from 60 to 65, ultimately refusing to hold a vote on at the controversial measure sponsored by Senator Alma Francis-Heyliger.

Other measures to be deliberated Monday in the first block are Bills 34-0081; Bill No. 34-0097, and Bill 34-0072.

Bill 34 – 0081 is an Act seeking to amend title 27 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 17 relating to barbering and cosmetology services to reflect the barbering and cosmetology services that are being currently offered and to rename the chapter and the Board to reflect the changes. It is

sponsored by Senator Novelle E. Francis, Jr.

Bill No. 34-0097 will provide for the repealing and re-enacting title 17 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 11, section 130, relating to authority to discipline pupils in schools; and repealing Title 17 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 9, subchapter I, section 87, relating to the punishment of pupils by school officials. Sponsored by: Senators Janelle K. Sarauw and Genevieve R. Whitaker Block II

Bill No. 34-0072 is an Act amending Title 23 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 5, providing for the declaration of firearm components upon their entry into the Virgin Islands, and other related purposes Sponsored by: Senator Dwayne M. DeGraff.

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