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A New Year of Advocacy Work Dreams for AARP-VI to Make Possible

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Happy New Year 2022! It is a new year and full of opportunities. At the same time, it has begun with many of the challenges we already faced in 2021. The Coronavirus continues to cause high positivity rates in the territory with the new Omicron variant spreading. Instead of looking to return to some normalcy by physically returning to work and school, we continue to be uncertain about how soon that will be.

Virgin Islanders are what is known as “COVID fatigued.” The virus continues to force isolation, stay at home as much as possible, and quarantine. Isolation is now a part of the daily vocabulary as if it was normal. The truth is many, especially seniors, are most affected. As virtual everything continues, they have not been able to socialize as they did and how they know it, and not having the knowledge to use technology makes it impossible to stay connected. Because of their limited

expertise with technology, those who can get online are subject to fraud. Others that cannot get online might be victims of abuse.

Advances in technology have caused most transactions to occur electronically, and with the pandemic, the need to continue making them online has grown. Older adults that don't know how to use technology depend on someone else to pay bills, send messages, connect with offices, or access important documents. Even VI Government Retirees must access their statements online and, along with others, their Social Security benefits records. Depending on others to do this raises the possibility of them being controlled. The person who is supposed to be caring for them or assisting them with these daily needs may become abusive. The victims may feel they have no choice but to remain quiet.

AARP in The Virgin Islands passed [Bill No. 33-0077](#) to prevent elder abuse. There is more work to be done, and this year AARP-VI will continue to push for the passage of other legislation to protect older adults from elder abuse.

The Protection from Elder Abuse Bill is one of the many pieces of legislation that AARP-VI advocates for on behalf of its members and Virgin Islanders. Others include making the VI communities livable for all ages, working to ensure that people can save for retirement and become financially resilient are other priorities of the local arm of the organization. Teaching older adults how to use technology is also high on their radar. Because of its work, Virgin Islanders took advantage of [broadband connection discounts of up to fifty to seventy-five dollars per month](#) for internet service last year.

The work involved addressing the many priorities and issues that AARP-VI advocates for daily is led by volunteers that partner with staff to make the intended result a reality. Advocacy is the primary pillar of the organization, and they advocate with passion. This passion is like that of one of the greatest advocates and heroes of the civil rights movement, who in 1964 became the youngest man to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, and whose work marked an era of true change, Martin Luther King, Jr.

On January 17, 2022, Martin Luther King, Jr. is remembered and celebrated because of his fight for social change. The Virgin Islands is one of the first in the nation to recognize his work and legacy. Dr. King was an outspoken opponent of racism and injustice and believed in the power of individuals to come together and create social change that makes life better for all people.

Like Martin Luther King, Jr., AARP in The Virgin Islands continues to fight for social change. In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr. "I Have a Dream," AARP-VI has a dream, the dream to continue to lead in social change, to protect elders from abuse, that Virgin Islanders can transit with all modes of transportation all streets in the territory through the passage of a Complete Streets Policy, that Caregivers can care for themselves while they care for their loved ones, and to make the Virgin Islands livable for all ages among so many others. They continue to persevere through all challenges to make these dreams real possibilities for all.

Learn more about AARP in The Virgin Islands advocacy work by visiting aarp.org/vi or their [advocacy page](#) or Like and follow their Facebook page at Facebook.com/aarpvi and Spanish page Facebook.com/aarpviespanol. Sign up to receive advocacy e-mail action alerts on the issues you care about and alerts when we need you to join us in supporting legislation at aarp.org/getinvolved.

AARP-VI wishes all a Happy Martin Luther King, Jr. Day!

