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## Senators Who Were Former Enforcement Officers Vote Against Bill Giving Victims Notification When an Offender is Released; 9 Measures Move Forward

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Senators Kenneth Gittens, left, Franklin Johnson, top right, and Genevieve Whitaker voted against Bill No. 34-0141 contending it's a duplication of current statute. By. THE V.I. LEGISLATURE

A majority of senators who make up the Committee on Rules and Judiciary on Thursday voted in favor of legislation that would make it mandatory for victims of various types of bodily harm criminal offenses to be notified whenever the perpetrator is released on bail or after serving a custodial sentence. However, the bill's sponsor, Senate President Donna Frett-Gregory expressed concern that two senators who formerly served as enforcement officers voted against the measure.

“It protects victims and defines crimes against the victim as criminal offenses such as bodily harm, assault, kidnapping, and rape and requires notification of victims. This definition expands the notification beyond domestic violence. Currently, the law requires notification if there is an alleged crime associated with domestic violence,” said Ms. Frett-Gregory while calling on the senators to think of persons who had crimes committed against them.

However, speaking during a point of personal privilege, Senator Kenneth Gittens said his decision to vote no was based on his understanding that there are legislative measures that already provide for notification to be communicated to victims of crimes.

“You are perplexed that we did not support the measure; this is what happens when we try to just shuttle things through and not have the proper discussion in taking this measure forward,” Mr. Gittens said as he sought to justify his no vote.

The senator said there is already a victims aggregate within the V.I. Police Department and the V.I. Department of Justice. “If those two layers fail, my goodness! He later criticized the measure for what he suggested was inconsistencies. “In the amendment offered you are talking about no more than 15 days before the defendant is released in one aspect, and in the next aspect you are talking about not later than 30 days after the defendant is released. So, which one is it?” he asked.

Senator Franklin Johnson, a former corrections officer who also voted against the measure, defended his vote. “There is something called Victims of Violent Crimes and based on that Act alone, victims know when the perpetrators are being released. This is something I know about — I am not guessing — from my working in the prison.”

Senator Genevieve Whitaker also voted against the bill. She said she supports the measure's intent but believes those goals are already mandated in Act 7519, and that Bill 34-0141 is simply adding more layers.

Bill No. 34-0141 is an Act amending Virgin Islands Code Title 34, Chapter 8 to require the Bureau of Corrections and the V.I. Attorney General's Office to notify expeditiously victims of the release of the perpetrator. The bill also amends Title 5, Chapter 407, Section 4606 relating to restitution and notification of victims of crime by the Territorial Parole Board of an inmate's release to increase the time, contents, and the methods of notification to a crime victim of an inmate's release.

The Committee on Rules and Judiciary includes chairman Sen. Milton Potter, vice chair Mr. Gittens, Sens. Nouvelle Francis, Carla Joseph, Steven Payne, Ms. Whitaker and Mr. Johnson. Sens. Francis, Potter, Joseph and Payne supported the measure, resulting in its approval. The three who voted against the bill were all St. Croix lawmakers.

Also receiving approval from the Committee on Rules and Judiciary were:

Bill No. [34-0055](#) - An Act amending title 34 Virgin Islands Code by adding a chapter 4 to be known as “The Responsible Fatherhood Act of 2022.

Bill No. [34-0148](#) - An Act honoring and commending LaVerne E. Ragster for her contributions and research efforts to the Virgin Islands, the University of the Virgin Islands and the children of the Virgin Islands and naming the University of the Virgin Islands Administration and Conference Center on the island of St. Thomas in her honor

Bill No. [34-0154](#) - An Act amending title 17 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 5, section 41a relating to bilingual education to direct the Department of Education to establish and maintain the Bilingual and English Language Development Program in the public schools)

Bill No. [34-0155](#) - An Act amending the Virgin Islands Code title 3, chapter 29, relating to notaries, notarial officers, and notarial acts by adding subchapter III enacting the “Virgin Islands Uniform Law on Notarial Acts (2021)””; and amending and repealing conflicting laws on notaries public.

Bill No. [34-0072](#) - 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

Bill No. [34-0142](#) - An Act amending the Virgin Islands Code title 20, chapter 45 by adding a subchapter II to provide for an Automatic license plate reader system as a crime-fighting tool throughout the Virgin Islands; amending title 20, chapter 32, subchapter I relating to the intra-island transport of motor vehicles to provide additional requirements in section 225a for transporting motor vehicles intra-island and adding section 225c to provide for a special permit for vehicles brought into the Virgin Islands; amending title 3, chapter 33, section 881(g) relating to public records to exclude from public examination captured plate data from automatic license plate reader systems; requiring the Virgin Islands Police Department in conjunction with the Office of the Attorney General to promulgate regulations relating to the automatic license plate reader system; making a \$500,000 appropriation to the Virgin Islands Police Department to establish a pilot speed and red-light camera program; and providing for other purposes.

Bill No. [34-0170](#) - An Act amending the Virgin Islands Code, title 29, chapter 12, sections 708, 708a, 708b, 710, 711, 712, 713a(b)(5), 715 and 723 relating to Economic Development Program, amend the incentives to beneficiaries to further their commitments to investment in the Virgin Islands community

Bill No. [34-0171](#) - An Act amending Virgin Islands Code title 3, chapter 27, section 706 and chapter 28A, section 755 relating to the service retirement annuity to allow retirees to reenter government service and retain their annuity while paying a contribution to the Retirement System; amending title 3, chapter 25, subchapter III relating to the government personnel position classification system position to cover positions of annuitants who reenter government service; and for other related purposes.

All bills were forwarded to the Committee of the Whole for further deliberation.