

# Gittens-Sponsored Bill Would Forfeit Pension of Any Public Employee Convicted of Stealing Gov't Funds

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Senator Kenneth Gittens has introduced a measure that will allow for the forfeiture of pension benefits for any public employee convicted of stealing from the Government or otherwise abusing the public trust for personal gain, Mr. Gittens's office has announced.

Bill No. 33-0216 was introduced before the Committee on Rules and Judiciary on Thursday.

“Nearly all states impose some provision for forfeiture of pension benefits for those convicted of utilizing their positions in government office to embezzle funds,” Mr. Gittens said. “We have our fair share of these kinds of cases and I see no reason why someone that steals from the people of the Virgin Islands or otherwise abuses their power should be allowed to spend the rest of their lives collecting a pension from GERS. When you violate the public trust, the penalties must be

severe and we must do more to crack down on the white collar crime that is at the root of so many of our problems here in the Territory.”

Committee members voted to hold the bill given that the testifiers - the Attorney General, the Inspector General, and the GERS Administrator - were not present on Thursday.

Mr. Gittens's legislation calls for an offender's retirement benefits to be utilized to pay restitution. Once restitution is made, the balance would either go toward the expense of their incarceration or be applied toward the Government Employees Retirement System's unfunded liability, the senator's office said.

“Perhaps this law will let those considering stealing from our Government or otherwise abusing their power for criminal activity to think twice, even three times, about the repercussions of their actions,” he said.

Senator Novelle E. Francis is a co-sponsor of the measure.