

The Virgin Islands Consortium

In Important Action, Bills Approving Leased Properties to Several Nonprofits For Continuance of Essential Services Move Forward

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Senator Donna Frett-Gregory sponsored several measures aimed either renewing or providing new lease agreements to nonprofits to provide essential services to the community. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

A number of social charitable organizations will continue to benefit from leasing property from the government of the Virgin Islands if their requests are approved by the Committee on Rules and Judiciary through bills sponsored by Senator Donna Frett-Gregory. Senate approval of the leases would also see new services being offered.

On Monday, lawmakers in the Committee on Finance voted in favor of several measures to include an Act approving the lease agreement between the government of the Virgin Islands, acting through the commissioner of the Department of Property and Procurement and the V.I. Resource Center for the Disabled, Inc.

P&P Deputy Commissioner Vincent Richards came before the Senate requesting an amendment be passed to allow the use of the 24,379 square feet facility to teach computer programming to the disabled population.

The term of the lease is for 20 years with a payment of \$1,200 annually, broken down into \$100 monthly during the term of the lease.

Speaking in favor of the agreement, Shamora Lenard, program director at the Resource Center said the additional space will allow the organization to continue to offer a space for differently-abled individuals to learn academically and apply their skills in a safe environment.

The Resource Center is also a fully assisted computer technology lab administered through the V.I. Next Generation Network (viNGN).

Approximately 107,971 square feet of land will also be allocated to the Village-Virgin Islands Partners in Recovery, Inc. to expand its drug prevention outreach efforts.

"The property will be used as a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center and for other related purposes," Mr. Richards said.

That agreement is also for a period of 20 years with a leasing fee of \$3000, with payments of \$250 monthly.

Regional Director of Westcare/The Village Partners in Recovery, Marsha Taylor, said the agreement would help secure a property lease and allow the organization to benefit from federal funding. There is currently no agreement in place with The Village Partners in Recovery, though the nonprofit has been using the government-owned property.

"The approval of this lease is necessary and its unavailability costs the Village daily. Every cent is needed and our program can provide qualitative and quantitative justifications for every penny," she said.

She added, "Now is not a time to reduce funding or resources for those that we serve battling mental health and substance abuse."

Ms. Taylor told lawmakers that the nonprofit has been unable to make the necessary changes on the facility like creating access for people with disabilities.

Meanwhile, the Catholic Charities of the Virgin Islands will do its part to help in the social fight by leasing land from the government for the next 10 years to operate a homeless shelter and to teach computer literacy to the homeless population.

Sandra Thomas-Mason, assistant to the director of Catholic Charities said the lease improvement will allow the charity to continue to provide social service, housing and counseling to the homeless and despondent population within the territory.

The 65-year-old charity will only be required to pay an annual fee of \$1,200, payable at \$100 per month.

Much like the catholic charity, Star Time Technology Center will receive the same leasing conditions under a new agreement to open and operate a community technology learning and training center in St. Thomas for the next 10 years.

Dr. Stanley Phillips said the opening of the technology center is likely to result in increased literacy and technology proficiency.

Sponsor of the bills, Senate President Donna Frett Gregory noted how important it is that nonprofits and other organizations provide support for people in the territory.

"The government of the Virgin Islands cannot provide all our needs so when we have nonprofits stepping up to the plate," she said. "Our responsibility as leaders is to support them in whatever way that we can."

Additionally, provisions were approved for the Caribe Tradewinds Lodge to conduct meetings, community outreach activities, feed the homeless, mentor youth, and for other related purposes on government leased lands.

These Lease Agreements all require legislative approval in accordance with 31 Virgin Islands Code 205 (c).

All members on the Committee on Finance voted in favor of the bills. They will now be sent to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary for further action.