

Legislature of the Virgin Islands

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The Honorable
Angel Bolques, Jr.
Senator-At-Large
35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands

CHAIRMAN
Committee on Culture, Youth, Aging, Sports, & Parks

VICE-CHAIRMAN
Committee on Economic Development & Agriculture

MEMBER
Committee on Rules & Judiciary
Committee on Homeland Security, Justice & Public Safety
Committee on Housing, Transportation, & Telecommunication
Subcommittee on Energy & Infrastructure Development



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MEDIA PRESS RELEASE

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Child Victims' and Witnesses' Rights Act Passed by Legislature and Sent to Governor for Consideration

U.S. Virgin Islands – Today, the Legislature of the Virgin Islands voted to pass Bill No. 35-0031, introduced by Senator Angel L. Bolques, Jr., which strengthens protections for child victims and witnesses in the legal system. The bill, titled The Child Victims' and Child Witnesses' Rights Act, now heads to the Governor for further action and consideration.

The proposed legislation, Sponsored by Senator Angel Bolques Jr. and co-sponsored by Senators Dwayne M. DeGraff and Marvin A. Blyden and supported by all of our colleagues, establishes a comprehensive framework to protect the rights and well-being of children involved in criminal cases as either victims or witnesses. The bill, which repeals and amends Chapter 301 of the Virgin Islands Code, introduces provisions to ensure alternative testimony methods for children, increased privacy measures, and the use of multidisciplinary teams to handle cases involving child maltreatment.

Senator Bolques emphasized the critical importance of this legislation in protecting the most vulnerable members of society. "Children who experience the trauma of abuse or witness a crime often endure unimaginable hardship," Senator Bolques stated. "This legislation ensures that our legal system provides the support and protection these children need, minimizing the further emotional harm or retraumatization that can come from testifying in court."



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Key components of the bill include the right for children to testify via two-way closed-circuit television, protections for the privacy of child victims, and the inclusion of emotional support through adult attendants or small support animals during court proceedings. Additionally, it mandates the use of multidisciplinary teams composed of professionals from law enforcement, health services, and victim advocacy to coordinate comprehensive care and legal action in child abuse cases.

"This bill, along with the amendments previously passed by the Rules and Judiciary Committee, clarifies critical definitions and further enhances protections against the exploitation and mistreatment of children," Senator Bolques explained. "We have strengthened the definition of child exploitation to encompass all forms of coercion for sexual or financial gain, and we've included necessary provisions to safeguard children's mental and emotional well-being during legal proceedings."

The amendments passed previously by the Rules and Judiciary Committee included modifications to several sections, such as clearer definitions of exploitation, physical and emotional harm, and the roles of multidisciplinary teams. These changes ensure that the Act is comprehensive and adaptable to the needs of child victims and witnesses in the Virgin Islands.

In expressing gratitude for the collaboration that shaped this crucial legislation, Senator Bolques extended special thanks to the Virgin Islands Department of Justice, Assistant Attorney Generals Chad Mitchell and William Appleton, as well as Deputy Commissioner Carla Benjamin of the Department of Human Services. "Their hard work and dedication to refining these amendments have been invaluable," Senator Bolques stated. "Their expertise and commitment to protecting our children have greatly strengthened this bill, ensuring it is comprehensive, effective, and ready to serve our community."

Senator Bolques concluded, "With this legislation, we send a clear message: the protection of our children is paramount. As this bill moves forward to the Governor's desk, I urge its swift approval so that every child in the Virgin Islands has the protection they deserve under the law."

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