

Legislature of the Virgin Islands

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

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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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Senator At Large Angel Bolques Jr. Thanks Governor Bryan Jr. for Signing Historic Child Protection Legislation into Law

U.S. Virgin Islands — Senator Angel Bolques Jr. expressed heartfelt gratitude today to Governor Albert Bryan Jr. for signing the "Child Victims' and Child Witnesses' Rights Act" (Bill No. 35-0031) into law. This landmark legislation, now Act No. 8923, is a profound step forward in the protection of children across the Virgin Islands, ensuring comprehensive support for child victims and witnesses involved in the judicial process.

"I am deeply thankful to Governor Bryan for recognizing the importance of this legislation and for standing with us in our commitment to safeguard our youngest and most vulnerable community members," said Senator Bolques. "This law embodies a commitment to creating a safer, more supportive environment for children who face traumatic circumstances and are called upon to navigate our judicial system."

The newly enacted legislation introduces critical rights and protections for children involved in legal proceedings, particularly those who have experienced abuse or are called upon to witness in criminal cases. The Child Victims' and Child Witnesses' Rights Act provides a structured support system through measures such as:



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- ❖ Emotional and Psychological Support - Enabling child victims and witnesses to have an adult attendant for emotional support and even allowing small comfort animals to accompany them during court proceedings.
- ❖ Privacy and Protection of Identity - Mandating secure handling of documents and sealed records to protect children's identities and ensure their confidentiality throughout judicial processes.
- ❖ Innovative Testimony Options - Offering alternatives to traditional in-court testimony, such as two-way closed-circuit television or videotaped depositions, to prevent further trauma.
- ❖ Use of Multidisciplinary Teams - Engaging specialized teams of health professionals, child advocates, and legal experts to provide tailored care and coordination for each child, including medical, psychological, and case management services.
- ❖ Guardian Ad Litem Assignment - Appointing trained advocates to represent the best interests of the child, ensuring they receive consistent care and advocacy throughout their involvement in the legal system.

Senator Bolques thanks his esteemed colleagues in the Senate for their steadfast support in passing this vital bill. "I am proud to work alongside a Senate that prioritizes the well-being of our youth. It offers a responsive framework for addressing child abuse cases sensitively and efficiently, minimizing further distress or traumatization for the children involved.

"This is a day of hope for every child in our territory," added Senator Bolques. "We have sent a clear message that no child should have to endure this alone; with this law, they have a support system and rights to protect them."

The passage of Act No. 8923 reflects a milestone in the Virgin Islands, underscoring a profound commitment to creating a safe, nurturing environment for the children of the Virgin Islands.

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