

# Legislature of the Virgin Islands



P.O. BOX 1690  
ST. THOMAS, U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS 00802  
(340) 693-3571

The Honorable

**Angel Bolques, Jr.**

**Senator-At-Large**

**36<sup>th</sup> Legislature of the Virgin Islands**

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## **Media Contact:**

**Senator Angel Bolques Jr.**

**Telephone: (340) 693-3571**

**Email: [senatorbolques@legvi.org](mailto:senatorbolques@legvi.org)**



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## **Senator Bolques Stands Firm Against New Fees That Punish St. John Residents Calls VIPA's Proposed Charges "Unfair and Regressive" with St. John's Realities**

**St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands** — Senator At Large, Angel L. Bolques Jr. is strongly opposing the Virgin Islands Port Authority's (VIPA) proposed marine and parking fees, calling them regressive and unfair to the people of St. John—an island already carrying the highest cost of living and the least access to public services in the territory.

The proposed fees include: An Additional Passenger Fee for Non-Drivers at the Red Hook Barge Ramp. A Cargo Overflow Staging Fee and A Paid Parking System at the Victor Sewer Marine Facility lot (across from the Cruz Bay Post Office).

Unlike St. Thomas and St. Croix, St. John lacks full-service public infrastructure, including a fully operational fire station, a Human Services office, a Youth and Recreation Center, and medical facilities, among others. Many government departments do not maintain full local offices on St. John, and those that do often operate with limited hours, reduced staff, or restricted services. As a result, residents are often forced to travel to St. Thomas at their own expense for essential services, appointments, and basic necessities.

VIPA's 2025 Marine Tariff currently exempts cargo transported between St. Thomas and St. John from ship dues and applies reduced wharfage fees—explicitly recognizing the economic and logistical dependency between the two islands. "These exemptions exist for a reason. They acknowledge the hardship," said Bolques. "So why now are we proposing to reverse course—*without* any improvement in services?"

Senator Bolques also highlighted that VIPA's Airline Incentive Program grants 100% landing fee waivers and 50% reductions in terminal and user fees to airlines expanding service into the territory. Meanwhile, cruise lines receive discounted port dues at St. Croix to boost tourism traffic.

“If VIPA can give generous breaks to billion-dollar airlines and cruise lines, it can afford to treat St. John residents with fairness,” said Bolques. “This kind of imbalance is deeply concerning.”

Here is why the Proposed Fees Are Unfair to St. John Residents

1. Red Hook Barge Ramp – Non-Driver Passenger Fee

- Discriminates against non-drivers, including seniors, young people, low-income residents, and those without access to vehicles.
- No added infrastructure or service improvements—just an extra charge to get on the barge.
- Creates a two-tier travel system that penalizes accessibility. (Vehicle + Passenger)

2. Cargo Overflow Staging Fee

- Raises costs for nearly all goods brought into St. John.
- Hurts small businesses already moving supplies and goods from St. Thomas to St. John
- Residents will pay more for food, fuel, construction materials, and basic essentials—on an island where prices are already the highest.

3. Paid Parking at the Cruz Bay VIPA Lot

- Removes free access to a central location historically used by residents for daily tasks—mail, banking, errands, and ferry transit.
- Targets locals, not tourists or transient traffic.
- Introduces a new cost without any plan for improvements, maintenance, or security.

“VIPA may be meeting with the public, but what we need is a fair plan—one that matches what people pay with the services they actually receive,” said Senator Bolques. “Right now, that balance doesn’t exist. These proposed fees would only make life harder for those who already face the greatest challenges. We should be closing that gap—not making it wider.”

He continued: “Charging a non-driver passenger fee at Red Hook is essentially taxing people for not owning a car. When many residents can’t afford a vehicle, insurance, or the barge fee to begin with, this kind of charge hits the most vulnerable the hardest.”

“I remain committed to standing against any policy that places an unfair burden on our people—especially those in communities that have historically been underserved,” said Senator Bolques. “My focus has always been on equity, access, and accountability. I will continue to fight for fair, lasting solutions that improve the quality of life for all Virgin Islanders and ensure that no one is left behind,” he concluded.

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