

Committee on Gov't Operations, Consumer and Veterans Affairs Forwards Approved Bills to Rules and the Judiciary

Date : May 1, 2019

The Committee on Government Operations, Consumer & Veterans Affairs, chaired by Sen. Athneil "Bobby" Thomas, met in the Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall on Monday, to take testimony and consider bills relating to taxi medallions and trade name registration.

In its first block, the Committee considered two bills which spoke specifically about taxi medallions for Veterans. Bill No. 33-0006, sponsored by Sen. Dwayne M. DeGraff, which seeks to "...amend title 20 VIC, part II, chapter 37, subchapter II, section 407 relating to taxi medallions, to prohibit veterans who obtain taxi medallions at auction from selling the medallion to a person who is not a veteran"; and Bill No. 33-0009, sponsored by Sen. Marvin A. Blyden, which seeks to "...amend title 20 VIC, part II, chapter 37, subchapter II, section 407 relating to the sale of taxi medallions by adding a new subsection (d) providing a definition of Virgin Islands Veteran for the purposes of the section".

In his testimony, Patrick D. Farrell, Director of the V.I. Office of Veterans Affairs, expressed his support for both measures. He said it would be unfair for non-veterans to benefit from a law that was initially created for veterans, and noted that "there are many Veterans awaiting the opportunity to own a taxi medallion via this process." With his support of Bill No. 33-0009, Farrell suggested that the definition of Virgin Islands Veteran be considered for all sections of the V.I. Code pertaining to Veterans, similar to other state laws specific to veterans of their state.

Also testifying on both measures, from the V.I. Taxicab Commission, was Executive Director Levron Sarauw, Sr., who indicated that he is in support of both measures, noting that the Commission currently has a policy that mirrors Bill No. 33-0006.

Both bills were approved and forwarded to the Rules and Judiciary Committee.

The Committee also considered Bill No. 33-0030, sponsored by Sen. Thomas, which would, "...amend title 11, chapter 21, section 1213 of the Virgin Islands Code, by requiring the annual renewal of trade name registration". Sen. Thomas noted that it has been approximately 26 years since the fee schedule has been upgraded, and this measure seeks to bring the fees up-to-date, by suggesting an annual renewal fee of \$50. While Denise Johannes, Director of the Division of Corporations and Trademarks for the Lt. Governor's Office testified that the office is in favor of the change in fee, she said they would prefer that the biannual schedule remains, and that they be given the leeway to set "a reasonable fee by regulation". Senators did not agree with leaving that decision solely to the division without legislative approval, and voted to forward the measure to the Rules and Judiciary Committee, pending and amendment to allow the fee to remain biannual, with a change to \$100.

Committee members present at Monday's meeting along with Committee Chair Sen. Thomas, were Senators DeGraff, Novelle E. Francis, Jr., Javan E. James, Sr., Steven D. Payne, Sr., and Janelle K. Sarauw. Sen. Alicia V. Barnes was excused. Non-committee member Sen. Blyden was

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also present.

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