

## **BILL TO ESTABLISH CURATOR OF GOVERNMENT COLLECTION APPROVED**

**Date** : February 26, 2018

St. Thomas- The Committee on Workforce Development, Consumer Affairs and Culture, chaired by Sen. Janelle Sarauw, held a meeting on Monday, at the Capitol Building and voted favorably for Bill No. 32-0024- to provide for the position of Curator and to establish the Preservation of Historic Government Collections Act and for other purposes.

“There is a passion for preserving antiques, but we are not talking about re-investing into our people. I suggest that we invest in our historians so that they can be self-appointed Curators,” said Sen. Sarauw. “Local antiques are like a secret society in the Virgin Islands, and only certain people have access to them. My question is who are we doing this for?”

The measure seeks to establish the position of Curator of Government House Collections and provides that that person will be responsible for the unique and decorative arts collection at Government House.

The sponsor of the bill, Sen. Myron Jackson said, “Over the years there has been a steady decline of the protection of cultural resources such as government collections. The Virgin Islands is in a peculiar situation in the wake of the hurricane recovery, and the cultural resources are at the bottom of the totem pole. We can do better in protecting our history.”

Similarly, Arlene Pinney-Benjamin, Territorial Acting Director of Division of Libraries, Archives and Museums from the Department of Planning and Natural Resources expressed support for the bill. “The establishment of a curator is an important step in managing cultural patrimony on all levels of the Government of the Virgin Islands.”

Some of the duties of a Curator includes overseeing the conservation and study of historical collections in Government House, to prepare an emergency plan to relocate the collection in the wake of natural disasters and to be knowledgeable in business, marketing, fundraising and public relations.

However, officials from Government House does not support the measure. “We found within mandates of Title 29, chapter 27, “Antiques and Cultural Properties” in which most of the responsibilities assigned to an Oversight Committee and a Curator established within the State Historic Preservation Office,” said Director of Protocol for the Office of the Governor Lisa Webster-Potter. Sen. Brian Smith stated that anyone who doesn’t agree with having a Curator does not have the interest of the people of the Virgin Islands at heart because without history there is no pride.

“Is establishing a Curator an overlapping of responsibilities?” asked Sen. Sarauw. Director Potter said, “There are sufficient mechanisms in place to satisfy the proposed requirements. There is no need to establish an additional position of Curator within the Office of the Governor. Then Sen. Sarauw inquired, “Should each agency have a Curator or should one Curator be overseeing all government agencies?” Director Potter stated that an overall Curator is reasonable but not necessary for Office of the Governor because there aren’t daily tasks.

Sen. Nereida Rivera O’Reilly inquired about the total value of the antiques and artefacts owned by GVI. In response, Director Potter stated that each agency houses the items. There are different appraisal values for antiquities across the government. Sen. O’Reilly said, “There needs to be one Master List that has a photograph, value and description of each item.” However, Lloyd Bough, Jr. Commissioner of the Department of Property and Procurement stated that there is a Master List, but it is incomplete.

Separately, lawmakers also voted and approved Bill No. 32-0148-An Act amending Title 1, Virgin Islands Code, chapter 11 by adding section 200i establishing the month of May as Virgin Islands Stroke Awareness Month. All bills approved will be forwarded to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary for further consideration.

Senators present are Janelle Sarauw, Janette Millin Young, Positive Nelson, Myron Jackson, Brian Smith, Nereida Rivera O’Reilly and Sen. Marvin Blyden.

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