



GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS

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DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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Office of the Commissioner

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The Honorable Kenneth L. Gittens
Chair
Committee on Homeland Security, Justice and Public Safety
35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands

RE: Update on DPNR's Enforcement Division

Good day Chair Gittens, other members of the 35th Legislature's Committee on Homeland Security, Justice and Public Safety; non-committee members and legislative staff present, and members of the viewing and listening public. My name is Howard Forbes, Sr., Director of DPNR's Division of Environmental Enforcement, and I am present today representing Jean-Pierre L. Oriol, Commissioner for the Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR). As requested, I am here to provide an update on DPNR's Enforcement Division to include our functions, present status and challenges.

The Division of Environmental Enforcement (DEE) is the enforcement arm for DPNR. Our primary mandates are covered under Virgin Islands Code Title 25, Chapters 15 and 16 for the execution of Boating Safety regulations throughout the territory, and our secondary responsibility is the enforcement of fisheries regulations under Title 12, Chapter 9A. In addition to our primary and secondary responsibilities, DEE provides enforcement assistance for all the regulatory needs of the Department. Our primary source of funding comes from the Department of Homeland Security, US Coast Guard Boating Safety program, and we generate match funding from the fees collected for boating registration, mooring and anchoring in the territory. It is important to note that while our main responsibilities focus on the enforcement of the conservation laws of the Territory, the Conservation Enforcement Officers are Peace Officers as certified under the Peace Officer Standards and Training Council, as codified under 23 VIC Section 1201.

Within DEE we have a total of 11 Conservation Enforcement Officers – six (6) in the STT/STJ district and five (5) in the STX district – along with the Director and the Assistant Director, both of whom are also certified Peace Officers; we currently have one vacancy that we have reserved for placement of an officer on St. John. Over the last several years, we have been able to increase our manpower to our present staffing levels, but ideally, we would have at least 10 officers in each district. Unfortunately, given that our primary source of funding is a formula based on the number of registered vessels in the Territory, which has remained consistent over the years, we do not have the resources at this time to significantly increase our numbers. While we may not be able to increase the number of officers at this time, we have been able to capitalize on grant funding opportunities that have allowed us to improve our assets. In 2022 and early 2023 we replaced all of our terrestrial vehicles across the territory; in 2023 we purchased four rapid response vehicles and had all officers trained by

the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) in their use and operation, and in 2024 we are expecting the arrival of four (4) new patrol vessels.

In 2023, our officers spent 1918 hours doing marine patrols and 1910 hours doing fisheries enforcement; in partnership with our other DPNR Divisions, we served 15 Administrative Orders and assisted in 15 inspections. We have also provided assistance to the Virgin Islands Police Department and the Governor's Executive Security as we have assisted in providing coverage for Carnival, Festivals, Ag Fairs and other public events, coverage for visiting dignitaries, and numerous other special assignments. We stand at the ready to continue to assist whenever called upon.

This concludes my testimony. I am here to answer any questions you may have at this time.