

COMMITTEE ON BUDGET, APPROPRIATIONS AND
FINANCE

02/06/2024-AMENDED AND REPORTED OUT TO THE COMMITTEE ON RULES AND JUDICIARY

BILL NO. 35-0133

Thirty-Fifth Legislature of the Virgin Islands

September 12, 2023

An Act amending title 17 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 15, relating to scholarships by adding section 190gg to establish an educational scholarship program to support individuals interested in pursuing a career in the maritime industry in the Virgin Islands

PROPOSED BY: Senators: Angel L. Bolques, Jr., Samuel Carrión,
Donna A. Frett Gregory and Dwayne M. DeGraff
Co-Sponsor: Ray Fonseca

1 *Be it enacted by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands:*

2 **SECTION 1.** Title 17 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 15 is amended by adding section
3 190gg to read:

4 **§ 190gg. The Virgin Islands Maritime Industry Educational Scholarship**

5 The Virgin Islands Maritime Industry Educational Scholarship is established and
6 administered by the Virgin Islands Board of Education to provide support to individuals
7 interested in pursuing a career in the maritime industry in the Virgin Islands. The scholarship
8 aims to encourage and assist qualified students in obtaining the education and training
9 necessary for a successful career in various maritime-related fields.

10 (a) Maritime industry means all industries and sectors directly related to maritime
11 activities, marine shipping, logistics, sciences, or engineering and mechanics; maritime law,

1 economics, technology, tourism and recreation, or safety and security; environmental maritime
2 studies; diving and underwater technology; yachting and recreational boating; fishing and
3 aquaculture; mariculture; port management; naval architecture; and other related disciplines.

4 (b) The Board of Education shall develop guidelines, procedures, and criteria for the
5 application process, scholarship selection, and disbursement and repayment of funds.

6 (c) To be eligible for the scholarship, applicants must be residents of the Virgin Islands
7 and demonstrate a genuine interest in pursuing a career in the maritime industry. Eligible
8 applicants may include high school graduates, college students, or individuals seeking
9 enrollment in accredited maritime colleges, universities, vocational institutions, or other
10 recognized educational programs related to the maritime industry.

11 (d) The Virgin Islands Board of Education shall establish a fair and transparent
12 selection process to identify scholarship recipients, and applicants for the scholarship shall
13 apply to the Board of Education pursuant to regulations established by the Board.

14 (e) Scholarships granted under this section may not exceed \$10,000 per year and must
15 be applied to the payment of tuition, lodging, board, transportation expenses, or any other
16 related expenses in connection with the studies pursued in each case. Each scholarship granted
17 shall be for not more than four years. The Virgin Islands Board of Education shall release
18 scholarship funds once the recipient has been formally accepted for enrollment at an
19 educational institution.

20 (f) (1) A scholarship recipient must execute a contract with the Board
21 of Education agreeing to return to the Virgin Islands not later than 90 days after completion of
22 the course of study to work in the maritime industry or a related field for as many years or
23 portion thereof as the person pursued education and training under the scholarship.

1 (2) A scholarship recipient who diligently attempts to gain employment in the
2 Virgin Islands maritime industry or a related field for a period of not less than two years
3 without success, may petition the Board of Education for a review of their employment
4 obligation and for a release from the contract. The Board shall evaluate each petition on
5 a case-by-case basis and shall consider the scholarship recipient's efforts and the
6 employment market in the maritime industry or related field at the time the petition is
7 filed.

8 (3) Except as provided in paragraph (2), a student who fails to comply with the
9 requirements in paragraph (1) is liable to the Government of the Virgin Islands for the
10 amount of the scholarship.

11 (g) The Virgin Islands Board of Education may grant scholarships under this section
12 to applicants who are residents of the Virgin Islands for at least two years prior to the time of
13 application, notwithstanding that they might have been living outside of the Virgin Islands
14 temporarily while pursuing a course of study or while serving in the armed forces of the United
15 States.

16 (h) The Virgin Islands Board of Education shall maintain accurate records of the
17 scholarship program's administration, including the number of applicants, the selection process,
18 and the distribution of scholarship funds. An annual report on the scholarship program's
19 outcomes and impact shall be submitted to the Governor and the Virgin Islands Legislature for
20 review and evaluation.

21 (i) The Virgin Islands Board of Education shall conduct outreach efforts to promote
22 awareness of the scholarship program among potential applicants and educational institutions.
23 The scholarship program's information, application details, and deadlines must be made readily
24 available on the Board of Education's website and other appropriate platforms.

1 (j) There is authorized to be appropriated during each fiscal year such sums as the
2 Legislature may determine for deposit in the Virgin Islands Maritime Industry Educational
3 Scholarship. Upon appropriation, the sums shall remain available until expended.

4 **BILL SUMMARY**

5 This bill creates title 17, chapter 15, Virgin Islands Code, section 190gg and establishes
6 an educational scholarship fund to support individuals interested in pursuing a career in the
7 maritime industry in the Virgin Islands.

8 **BR23-0642/August 24, 2023/HLF**

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