

**TESTIMONY OF JENIFER O'NEAL
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET
TO THE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY, JUSTICE, PUBLIC
SAFETY, & VETERANS' AFFAIRS OF THE
33rd LEGISLATURE OF THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS
HONORABLE STEVEN PAYNE, CHAIRMAN
OCTOBER 23, 2019 10:00 AM**

Good afternoon Senator Steven Payne, Chairman, and other Members of the Committee on Homeland Security, Justice, Public Safety, & Veterans' Affairs of the 33rd Legislature of the U.S. Virgin Islands, other Senators present, and members of the listening and viewing audience.

I am Jenifer O'Neal, Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and I appear pursuant to your invitation to testify on Bill No. 33-0126 which seeks to amend Title 3, Chapter 1 of the Virgin Islands Code, by adding a new section to establish the Virgin Islands Office of Gun Violence Prevention under the Office of the Governor.

In my testimony, I will speak only to the financial aspects of the Bill and allow others more knowledgeable of the technicalities to address the other areas.

The proposed Section 27i (b) requires the appointment of a number of staff, to include an Executive Director, District Directors, and Office Manager, Survivor Engagement Specialists, Community Engagement Coordinators, Violence

Interrupters, and Analysts. I am unclear as to what type of analysts are needed as well as the number of persons overall that would need to be hired. Depending on the number of positions that are posted and filled, the cost of this new Office will far exceed the proposed \$700,000 referenced in Section 2 of Bill 33-0126.

Additionally, the Fiscal Year 2020 budget was recently passed and approved as a balanced budget, tying proposed expenditures to projected revenues. While I am aware that there were some differences in revenue projections, to the tune of almost \$20 million dollars, between what was submitted from the Executive Branch and what was ultimately approved by the Legislature, I am very much concerned about adding to or increasing the budget in any way at this time.

We should bear in mind that the Office of Management & Budget and the Department of Finance continues to monitor and manage collections and cash flow on a weekly basis to ensure effective continuity of operations, while also making sure that we can continue to pay our outstanding obligations including tax refunds and other debts from prior years. I am also keenly aware that going forward, the cost of continuing this new Office of Gun Violence Prevention under the Office of the Governor will be substantially higher than the initial \$700K in salaries alone, not to mention all of the outreach, reporting, and other responsibilities that are proposed. These are additional costs that we can ill-afford at this time, and may be better

absorbed within an existing department that can reassign persons to do the required duties.

In conclusion, due to the financial constraints detailed above the Office of Management and Budget cannot recommend approval of Bill No. 33-0126 unless and until additional revenues can be identified to fund this initiative or if this initiative can be enjoined with another suitable department with existing qualified personnel. Mister Chair, this concludes my testimony and I remain available to answer any questions that you may have.