

The Virgin Islands Consortium

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My Brother's Workshop, Abandoned Vehicles, and Condominium Bills Head to Full Senate

ST. THOMAS — The Committee on Rules and Judiciary at the Earl B. Ottley Legislative Hall on Friday voted to send two bills sponsored by Sen. Nereida "Nellie" Rivera-O'Reilly to the full Senate; a measure sponsored by Sen. Justin Harrigan, Sr. making it easier to tow abandoned vehicles; and approved the nomination of Laurel Hewitt-Sewer to the Board of Governors of the Virgin Islands Port Authority for the District of St. John.

The first Rivera-O'Reilly measure, [bill No. 31-0110](#), which was co-sponsored by Senators Kurt Vialet, Marvin Blyden and Clifford Graham, seeks to provide temporary use of the Department of Human Services' facility located in Estate Kingshill, St. Croix, to My Brother's Workshop as a youth training center.

At a previous Senate hearing officials of the Department of Human Services, charged with the mandate of Commissioner nominee Vivian Ebbesen-Fludd, opposed allowing My Brother's Workshop to temporarily use the facility, reasoning that the short-term stay may wind up being longer than expected.

Senators disagreed, however, ignoring the DHS officials and voting unanimously during the Health, Hospitals and Human Services hearing held in early June to move the measure to the Rules and Judiciary Committee.

"The bill seeks to implement My Brother's Workshop St. Croix chapter," Rivera-O'Reilly told *The Consortium* this morning. "This program teaches disengaged and adjudicated youths ages 18-24 construction and carpentry skills as well as other life skills."

Rivera-O'Reilly said the program has proven to be very successful on St. Thomas, and has served over 400 youth in the last 8 years. The senator also made known that the organization recently opened a bakery that's being operated by program participants.

"The unanimous support for the effort by the committee members show a serious commitment to our young people" Rivera-O'Reilly continued. "I am very proud of my colleagues."

The DHS building that will be used if the measure passes the full senate and is signed into law by Governor Kenneth Mapp has not been used for over 3 years, Rivera-O'Reilly said. Furthermore, the repairs needed to use the facility will be paid for by My Brother's Workshop — not the government.

The Committee also approved another Rivera-O'Reilly-sponsored measure, bill No. 31-0082, an act amending title 28 V.I.C., chapter 33, section 919 relating to annual audits of the books and records of managers or boards of apartments and condominiums.

The measure seeks to allow condominiums with 10 or less units to make available financial records upon request by condo owners, and also gives board members the authority to vote on the need for an audit. The proposed changes to the current law dating back to the 1960s that requires all condominiums to perform annual audits is much-needed, testifiers say, because the requirement is burdensome, costly and unwarranted.

The brief hearing also saw the committee forwarding a measure sponsored by Sen. Harrigan and co-sponsored by Sen. Novelle Francis, Jr. that seeks to allow police to ticket abandoned vehicles without current registration stickers and allow the government to recoup the costs of having the vehicles towed and stored.

During a Committee on Government Services, Veterans and Consumer Services hearing on April 22, Harrigan and fellow committee member Sen. Myron Jackson said they live in the urban Long Path and Hospital Ground areas respectively of St. Thomas – where narrow roads and population density due to the scarcity of land make every square foot count – said they are intensely affected by abandoned vehicles in their neighborhoods.

“Parking and blight are becoming ever more increasing problems,” Harrigan said.

Jackson brought pictures of three abandoned vehicles in his neighborhood to show the committee and said none of the cars so far have been tagged by police and that one of them has been there for at least a month.

“It sits there due to the demise of the community,” Jackson said, referring to one of the cars he photographed.

The testimony of Long Path resident Helen Edwards was read into the record by the legislative clerk and Edwards said UPS and DHL deliver drivers and taxi drivers refuse to traverse the road by her house because it is so narrow and there is nowhere to stop. Edwards added that garbage pickups are also hampered due to the narrowness of the street and abandoned vehicles congesting it.

Police Commissioner designee Delroy Richards Sr., after listening to all of the testimony on the bill said the creation of an abandoned vehicles task force in the 1990’s could be the reason “why police are not removing abandoned vehicles from the side of the road.”

“My question is: Is there a task force and is it functional?” Richards said.

Darryl Lewis of Property & Procurement said he recently removed abandoned vehicles in downtown Charlotte Amalie and in the time it took to transfer one of the vehicles to the impound lot in Sub Base, someone placed a valid registration sticker on one of the abandoned vehicles to keep it from being removed.

Lewis said even once the vehicles are stored on impound lot they can be stripped of parts or pose a safety and health hazard to children playing because there is a lack of security at the lot and dead and living pests such as rodents and cockroaches after often found in the abandoned vehicles.

All three measures on Friday, along with Hewitt-Sewer’s nomination to the VIPA, were approved unopposed.