GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

STATEMENT

Tel: (284)468-2730
Official Government Website:
https://gov.vg

2025 Speech from the Throne delivered by His Excellency the Governor, Daniel Pruce

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Legislative Blocks of Success:

Building a Sustainable Nation

As Governor of these Virgin Islands, I am grateful to be here today to carry out my constitutional responsibilities on behalf of His Majesty King Charles III in delivering the Speech from the Throne.

The Speech from the Throne is a tradition in the Commonwealth and Overseas Territories. It is written by the Government and delivered by the Head of State, or their Representative. The Speech from the Throne signals the opening of a new Session of the Legislature and previews the legislative agenda and major policies of the elected Government, as it seeks to achieve its objectives and responsibilities to the people in the society during the upcoming Session of the House of Assembly.

Madam Speaker, the First Session of this Fifth House of Assembly was a long and remarkably busy period, spanning part of 2023 and all of 2024. This Honourable House held 21 Sittings in the First Session - with most Sittings extending into several days and at times weeks. The House considered and approved forty-one pieces of legislation, along with various other business, reflecting the considerable amount of work done by the Legislature in fulfilling its mandate.

Madam Speaker, fifteen of the enacted laws were necessitated by the reform agenda developed from the Recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry (COI) and ten were necessitated by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Mutual Evaluation Report (MER) on the Virgin Islands' compliance with measures to combat money laundering and the financing of terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Passage of these twenty-five pieces of legislation further demonstrate this Legislature's resolve in addressing critical governance and reform imperatives. A sampling of legislation in relation to these two significant initiatives includes: Parliamentary Commission for Standards Act, 2024, Proliferation Financing (Prohibition) (Amendment) Bill, 2024, Financial Services Commission (Amendment) Bill, 2024, Financial Investigation Agency (Amendment) Bill, 2024, Counter-Terrorism (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill, 2024, BVI Health Services

Authority (Amendment) Bill, 2024, Limited Partnership (Amendment) Bill, 2024, National Parks Trust (Amendment) Act, 2024, Tourist Board (Amendment) Bill, 2024, H. Lavity Stoutt Community College (Amendment) Bill, 2024, and the British Virgin Islands Ports Authority (Amendment) Bill, 2024

This robust legislative agenda reflects the House's unwavering dedication to its constitutional responsibilities and to advancing the development and governance priorities of the Territory.

Madam Speaker, As we look to the Second Session of this Fifth House of Assembly, which now opens, the theme "***Legislative Blocks of Success: Building a Sustainable Nation"*** signifies the Government's commitment to the National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP) as the development, fiscal and legislative blueprint for our strategy of building a sustainable nation. It aligns with the theme of the 2025 Budget Address, *"Laying the Blocks of Success - Building a Sustainable Nation"*, which was delivered by the Honourable Premier on 11 November 2024. The structure of the NSDP focuses on six National Goals, and this Speech from the Throne will follow that structure in presenting the highlights of the Bills and amendments to existing legislation that the Government will invite the House of Assembly to consider in the upcoming Session, along with other priorities.

NSDP Goal 1 - The Environment

1. Madam Speaker, effective and responsible management of the natural environment, lands and marine resources of these Virgin Islands is extremely critical to the sustainable development of the Territory. Several items of legislation are proposed that will balance the need to protect and preserve our natural resources whilst also using them for economic development.
2. The **Crown Land Management Act, 2024** will introduce a transformative framework for administering and managing the Territory's Crown lands, emphasising transparency, efficiency, and accountability. It aims to promote sustainable development across residential, commercial, and agricultural sectors while balancing economic growth, environmental protection, and social stability. Key provisions include a Land Bank for strategic land resource management, ad hoc advisory panels for expert guidance, measures to

address issues like derelict vehicles and climate change challenges, equitable access to land, localised decision-making, and the responsible management of public infrastructure to meet the needs of a growing population.

3. The proposed **Environment, Marine Estate, and Coastal Zone Management Bill** aims to address the Virgin Islands' pressing environmental challenges while fostering sustainable development by balancing environmental protection with economic growth, ensuring the preservation of the Territory's natural resources for current and future generations. The Bill will establish a robust legal and institutional framework to tackle key environmental concerns, including climate change adaptation and mitigation, pollution control, waste management, hazardous substance regulation, and biodiversity conservation. It mandates environmental impact assessments (EIAs) and certificates of environmental clearance for projects that may affect the environment, ensuring development aligns with ecological sustainability and minimizes harm to natural habitats. The Bill aligns with international and regional agreements, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity, reinforcing the Virgin Islands' commitment to addressing global environmental challenges.
4. The **Economic Exclusive Zone Bill** represents a significant step in asserting and safeguarding the sovereign rights and authority of The Virgin Islands over its territorial sea, continental shelf, and exclusive economic zone. The Bill will provide a robust legal framework to regulate, manage, and protect these vital maritime areas in a manner that aligns with the principles of international maritime law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The Bill will ensure that economic opportunities from fisheries, energy exploration, marine scientific research, and other activities are balanced with the need to protect the marine environment. It prohibits unauthorised activities within these zones, establishes clear requirements for persons engaging in marine-related operations, proposes risk mitigation measures, and establishes a comprehensive enforcement framework, granting authorized officers the powers needed to prevent and address violations effectively. The Bill also establishes penalties for offenses, mechanisms for detaining and forfeiting vessels or equipment used in

contravention of the law, and legal recourse to ensure justice is served, among other features.

5. Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources, and Climate Change is collaborating with the Land and Survey Department to establish a **Land Review Committee** to revise and modernize the Territory's entire suite of land-related legislation. Technological advancements, economic shifts, and environmental factors reshape global and local landscapes, and hence the legal framework governing one of our most vital resources – land - must remain relevant, adaptable, and forward-looking. This revision aims to close gaps, eliminate inefficiencies, and align the laws with modern domestic and international standards in a rapidly changing world. This comprehensive review of land legislation is not merely a regulatory update but an investment in the Territory's future, ensuring a robust land management system that serves generations to come.
6. The Government will seek to bring forward a modernised **Non-Belonger Landholding Licence Policy** that integrates inclusivity, environmental stewardship, and social responsibility to attract and regulate investments aligned with the Territory's vision for a prosperous, resilient, and sustainable future. The policy will emphasise a transparent, stable, predictable, and investor-friendly regulatory environment that will attract investments in real estate and other innovative sectors to broaden the Territory's economic base. Economic development will be balanced with preserving the BVI's natural and cultural assets; and ensuring that development and investment actively contribute to the local economy, support social initiatives, and create opportunities that uplift residents.
7. Madam Speaker, over the years, breaches of the Physical Planning Act 2004 have occurred in construction projects across the Territory. Violations often arise from non-compliance with planning approvals, unauthorised alterations, or deviations from established guidelines. The Town and Country Planning Department has determined that the current legislative framework lacks the authority needed to take swift and decisive action against violators. To resolve these challenges, the Department has prioritised strengthening its legislative powers to enforce stricter compliance with construction and

development standards. The proposed **amendments to the Physical Planning Act 2004** will introduce a system of civil penalties, fines, and other enforcement mechanisms to address breaches promptly and effectively. The updated legislation will ensure that projects adhere to approved standards, creating a more orderly and well-regulated development landscape in the Territory, while promoting sustainable development practices.

NSDP Goal 2 - The Economy

1. Madam Speaker, Financial Services is one of the Virgin Islands' main economic engines and requires ongoing and diligent legislative action to maintain compliance and competitiveness given the requirements of that industry. The Virgin Islands boasts one of the most robust legislative and regulatory frameworks in the global financial services industry, and in 2025, the Government will continue to strengthen its financial services legislative framework.
2. For efficiency, provisions contained in the **Financial Services (Exceptional Circumstances) (Amendment) Bill, 2024** were incorporated into the **Financial Services Commission (Amendment) Act, 2024**. Appropriate legislation will be brought in 2025 to repeal those provisions that are now subsumed in the Financial Services Commission (Amendment) Act, 2024.
3. The **Wills Bill 2025** will modernise the existing Wills Act to reflect international law advancements, recognition of civil partnerships, and the complex needs of global asset management. It will provide much-needed clarity in areas previously marked by uncertainty by establishing clear provisions, particularly those related to formal validity and rectification of wills. It also supports modern approaches to succession and estate planning, while streamlining administrative processes, thereby enhancing the Virgin Islands' continued appeal as a preferred jurisdiction for company incorporations.
4. The **BVI Business Companies and Limited Partnerships (Beneficial Ownership) (Amendment) Regulations, 2025**, will introduce rights of access to beneficial ownership information by eligible categories that meet the legitimate interest test. The Regulations will be designed to balance

transparency with the protection of individuals' human and data rights, thereby allowing specific stakeholders with a demonstrable “legitimate interest” to access beneficial ownership information under defined circumstances, while ensuring that the Virgin Islands complies with international standards and best practices.

5. The **Anti-money Laundering (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations, 2024, will be amended** to introduce application and approval fees concerning the appointment by persons under the Financial Services Commission or Financial Investigation Agency’s supervisory remit of a money laundering reporting officer. The Regulations will give full effect to the new obligation for licensees to apply for the approval of the appointment of a money laundering reporting officer, introduced by the Anti-money Laundering (Amendment) Regulations, 2024. This will also ensure that financial services revenue is generated from the introduction of this requirement.
6. The **Financial Services (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations, 2024, will be amended** to introduce application and approval fees concerning the appointment of a money laundering reporting officer by a licensee, specifically for the Financial Services Commission - aligning with the proposed amendment contained in the Anti-money Laundering (Amendment) (No. 2.) Regulations, 2024. It will also introduce increased application and approval fees related to the appointment of a director or senior officer by licensees under the Banks and Trust Companies Act Revised Edition. The Regulations will give full effect to the new obligation for licensees to apply for the approval of the appointment of a money laundering reporting officer, introduced by the Anti-money Laundering (Amendment) Regulations, 2024. This will also ensure that financial services revenue is generated from the introduction of this requirement.
7. Madam Speaker, tourism is the engine of our economy and leading generator of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In 2025 the Government will provide the legislative infrastructure to make tourism a stronger economic driver by introducing a **Ministry of Tourism Bill** to support our newly established Ministry of Tourism function. The Bill will establish the legal framework for a government department responsible for managing tourism, outlining the

powers, functions, and responsibilities of the Minister of Tourism, including regulating tourism activities, developing tourism policies, and overseeing tourism infrastructure development.

8. Additionally, Madam Speaker, Government will repeal the **Festival and Fairs Act** and replace it with the **Festivals and Events Bill**. The Bill will create the BVI Festival and Events Board which will be responsible for planning, organizing, and executing festivals and unique events to attract visitors, boost the local economy, enhance the Virgin Islands' cultural image by providing unique experiences for visitors, tied to local traditions, food, arts, music, history, sports and other niche attractions reflecting Virgin Islands life. The Board will focus on using festivals and events to generate revenue for local businesses, contribute to the BVI brand image and reach and foster a sense of community by bringing locals together to celebrate their heritage and culture. The Board will work collaboratively with the Ministry of Tourism and the Tourism Authority on marketing, logistics, community engagement, sponsorships, and other areas to ensure smooth event execution.
9. The **Virgin Islands Gaming and Betting Control Act**, which was passed in 2020, established the framework for a regulated gaming industry, including the Commission to oversee activities in the industry. In 2025, action will be taken to improve the effectiveness of the Act and initiate the legal mandate of the Commission. Regulations will be made so licensing and enforcement of the law for legal operation of businesses to engage in gaming and betting activities in the Territory can begin in earnest.

1. Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Finance proposes to introduce amendments to the Commercial Recreational Vessels Licensing (CRVL) Act and other relevant legislations to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the commercial recreational vessel industry, with the goal of fortifying the position as a leading maritime jurisdiction in the region. The core amendments include a range of measures aimed at streamlining vessel categorization, ensuring vessel license integrity, promoting large yacht presence; strengthening registration requirements, mandating BVI charter

origin, and exempting BVI vessels from cruising permits and import duties.

1. Amendments to the **Commercial Recreational Vessels Licensing Act, 1992 (No. 8 of 1992)** include specifying that annual licenses shall be valid for one year from the date of issuance, changes to the number of off-charter days for certain categories of vessels, and the number of continuous days certain categories of vessels would be permitted to remain in BVI waters. Adjustments will also be made to the provisions for intra-trading.

1. Proposed amendments to the **Cruising and Home Port Permit Act, 2021 (No. 29 of 2021)** will refine the regulatory framework and address operational nuances. A new provision will establish an Annual Cruising Permit Exemption for term charter and day trip BVI vessels. It will become optional for vessels to appoint an agent. Additionally, a daily $5 cruising permit fee will replace the requirement for large passenger vessels to apply for a 24-hour exemption from the Commissioner. Residents of the Territory will also be exempted from cruising permits and specific exemptions will be made for certain vessel categories, including workboats, hotel boats, and vessels transporting guests, crew, or staff directly between designated points, provided they meet conditions set by HM Customs.

1. **The Customs Management and Duties Ordinance, 2010 (No. 6 of 2010)**, Schedule 5, is proposed to be amended to exempt BVI vessels, as defined, from import duties. However, this exemption will be subject to the condition that if the owning company intends to dispose of the vessel, the applicable import duty must be paid at the prevailing rate prior to disposal.

1. The **Tonnage Duty (Amendment) Bill, 2024** will modernize the framework for tonnage duty collection and enhance alignment with current practices.

Among the proposals is a provision to exempt ferries licensed under the **British Virgin Islands Ports Authority Act, 1990**, as well as vessels registered in the Virgin Islands and owned by BVI companies, from paying tonnage duty. Tonnage duties rates, where they do apply, will be revised.

1. Madam Speaker, on a consistent basis, reforms to tax legislation are required from time to time. The Miscellaneous**Amendments (SIGTAS) (Validation) Act, 2024** will facilitate retroactively bring the Miscellaneous Amendments (SIGTAS) Act, 2005 into force as of November 1, 2005 - its intended effective date, addressing procedural gaps in its enforcement. Furthermore, the Validation Bill to legitimize all monies collected under the provisions of the Miscellaneous Amendments (SIGTAS) Act, 2005 will be laid before the House of Assembly for consideration. Together, these actions aim to strengthen the legal framework surrounding the Act, ensuring compliance, and safeguarding the integrity of past and future revenue collections under its provisions.
2. The **Mutual Legal Assistance (Tax Matters) (Amendment), Bill 2024** will amend the Mutual Legal Assistance (Tax Matters) Act, Revised Edition 2020, to enhance compliance and clarify obligations under the principal Act. Key updates include refining notification requirements for financial institutions, expanding the scope of offences penalized for non-compliance by Reporting Virgin Islands Financial Institutions, and introducing penalties for obligations unmet by legal arrangements.
3. Other reforms that will be brought forward through the Ministry of Finance include a **Professional Accountants Bill** to regulate the professional accounting and auditing industry in the jurisdiction of the Virgin Islands with the intention of expanding the Financial Services Industry business in the Territory.
4. The **Asset Seizure and Forfeiture (Amendment) Act,** 2020 will establish a framework for managing, disposing of, and sharing property seized or restrained in connection with offences. It will empower the Minister to assist law enforcement, oversee forfeited property, and manage a **Seized Property Fund** for proceeds from forfeited assets. The Bill will also simplify

processes for obtaining management orders, managing seized property, issuing destruction orders, and sharing proceeds domestically and internationally.

5. The **Proliferation Financing (Prohibition) (Amendment) Bill, 2024** aims at enhancing compliance with FATF (Financial Action Task Force) Recommendation 7, which pertains to targeted financial sanctions related to proliferation financing. The Bill amends the **Proliferation Financing (Prohibition) Act, 2021** to:
    1. make the offences concerning the prohibition of dealings with assets linked to designated persons or entities, strict liability offences.
    2. remove the $10,000 financial threshold and require mandatory reporting of all transactions, regardless of amount, involving designated persons or entities, and
    3. placing an obligation on individuals with knowledge of such dealings to report to the Financial Investigation Agency (FIA

1. The Bill will also streamline the FIA's powers by expanding the Agency's authority issue guidelines on proliferation financing matters. This Bill is critical to aligning the Territory with international AML/CFT standards and addressing deficiencies identified in the Virgin Islands Mutual Evaluation Report.

1. Madam Speaker, the commercial maritime sector holds a lot of potential that has not yet been fully developed. The **Virgin Islands Merchant Shipping (Amendment) Bill, 2025** will amend the Merchant Shipping Act, 2001 to update the list of qualifying persons for owning a Virgin Islands ship; to enhance the implementation of the safety convention in the Virgin Islands and to give effect to regional and other codes of practice relating to the safety of ships; and to provide maritime enforcement powers.
2. To strengthen the fisheries sector, the **Food Security and Sustainability (Amendment) Bill, 2025** will be amended to provide for fishing using scuba equipment and the relevant Regulations will be developed to facilitate this

method of fishing as well as spearfishing. The Regulations will include appropriate safeguards to avoid overfishing.

3. The **Immigration and Passport Regulations** will be amended to further develop and streamline processes, requirements, fees and forms relative to Residence Status and Belonger Status. This amendment will also include the introduction of new initiatives that will target remote and executive clearance options for travellers, which will further enhance our tourism product through added services for these niche markets.
4. The Government also proposes to bring forward a Bill to amend the **Immigration and Passport Ordinance** to create a comprehensive visa legislation, which is critical to ensuring alignment with regional and international legal standards. This legislation will establish a robust legal framework for the processing of visas, addressing an important gap in the current system and reducing associated risks. In addition, the draft will incorporate the visa fees and rates approved by Cabinet, ensuring full compliance with the established financial framework. This initiative-taking approach will ensure that the Virgin Islands will be well-positioned to manage visa processes efficiently and in full compliance with global best practices, enhancing the Territory's ability to protect our borders and facilitate international travel.
5. Madam Speaker, the Territory continues to see a steady increase in irregular migration. The Government realises the need for local legislation to support persons fleeing their homeland due to legitimate fear. An **amendment to the Immigration and Passport Act** will introduce sections to address the administration, processing and management of Asylum and Refugee cases in the Territory.
6. Further, the **Immigration and Passport Act** will be amended to allow for ease of processing mechanisms for the spouse and children of persons deemed to Belong to the Virgin Islands. This will formalise policy and bring the legislation in line with the Government's vision on the right to family life for Belongers of the Virgin Islands.
7. The **Advance Passenger Information Act** will be repealed and replaced to allow for the Territory to maintain pace with international best practices for

the collection, transmission, sharing, storage and regulation of Advance Passenger Information and Passenger Name Record. This will facilitate the Immigration Department’s efforts to increase its use of technology and risk-based mechanisms to target illegitimate travellers and individuals using the Territory for irregular migration, in a more effective manner.

8. In 2025, substantial **amendments will be made to the Virgin Islands Investment Act, 2021 and Business Licensing Act, 2022**. These changes will strategically transfer authority from the Trade Commission to the Minister and Ministry responsible for Trade, enabling a more focused approach to developing our trade services. This transition will be accompanied by a comprehensive restructuring of the Trade Department to ensure efficient delivery of services. The centralisation of authority within the Ministry, will better align trade policies with our broader economic development goals, ensuring a cohesive and strategic approach to fostering investment and economic growth in the Virgin Islands.
9. As part of the amendments a two-tier approval process for foreign investors will be introduced, which will be seamlessly integrated into a one-stop service approach. This innovative system is designed to streamline procedures whilst maintaining rigorous oversight. This approach ensures that whilst the Government maintains necessary checks and balances, the process remains efficient, transparent, and user-friendly for all foreign investors seeking to contribute to our economy.
10. The amendments also aim to create a more responsive and agile regulatory environment, capable of adapting to the dynamic needs of both local and international investors. In line with this goal, the Government is making significant changes to its investment and residency programmes. The **Residency by Investment Programme** will be separated from the Investment Act and placed under the Immigration and Passport Act. This change will introduce new pathways to Residence Status, establish clear guidelines and criteria, and implement a quota system based on our Territory's capacity, creating a more structured and transparent system for those seeking residency in our beautiful islands.

11. Furthermore, the **Business Licensing Act, 2022 will be amended** to further streamline the licensing process, reducing bureaucratic hurdles, and fostering a more dynamic economic environment.
12. Madam Speaker, in 2025, the Government will also be **revising the Consumer Protection Act 2020** to further enhance its effectiveness and address emerging consumer concerns, particularly regarding pricing. This revision will strengthen the promotion of good business practices and ensure that consumer protection remains a top priority in our evolving economic landscape. The Government is committed to enhancing consumer education initiatives, providing accessible avenues for redress, and improving consumer awareness and information. These efforts aim to encourage responsible and informed consumer choices, fostering a market environment that balances business growth with strong consumer safeguards. Through these comprehensive measures, the Government is ensuring that as the economy develops, it does so in a manner that is fair, transparent, and beneficial to all consumers in the Virgin Islands.
13. In 2025, the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise policy will be expanded with the introduction of a **Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise (MSME) Act**. This legislation will address the unique needs of MSMEs and create an enabling environment in which these vital businesses can develop, grow, and thrive. This legislation will establish a robust framework to support MSMEs through various stages of their development, from inception to expansion and beyond. This Act will work in tandem with existing MSME Policy and Grant Programme, creating a comprehensive ecosystem of support for our local entrepreneurs.
14. In addition to these measures, a **National Quality and Standards Policy** will be introduced to enhance the competitiveness of Virgin Islands' products and services in global markets. Further, a **Fair Competition Policy** will be implemented to promote healthy competition and prevent monopolistic practices. The overall aim is to create a more robust, efficient, and competitive economic environment in the Virgin Islands as a foundation for sustainable economic growth and increased global competitiveness.

NSDP Goal 3 - Infrastructure

1. Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Communications and Works proposes to pilot a number of initiatives aimed at improving the management of public infrastructure and the delivery of services under its remit.
2. The **Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill, 2025** will seek to amend the Road Traffic Act (CAP. 218) to modernise the legislation to improve road safety, enforce compliance and updated, stricter penalties. The amendments will also include traffic management tools and modernised standards for licensed vehicles to ensure safe use of the roads.
3. The **Wickham's Cay Development Authority Act (CAP. 281)** will be amended to introduce a Board and a secretariat to oversee development, management, and operations in the city of Road Town. The amended Act will also seek to support the Authority’s financial sustainability, enforcement powers, and historic preservation through continued oversight of the 99-year Wickham's Cay leases.
4. The Water and Sewerage Authority Act, 2022, which established the Water and Sewerage Authority as a statutory corporation to provide water supply and sanitation services will be repealed and replaced by the **Virgin Islands Energy and Water Corporation Act, 2025**. This Act will bring the production of energy and water under one statutory organisation, mitigating the challenges faced in the provision of water and sewerage services by cost effective integration of those functionalities with the BVI Electricity Corporation.
5. The **Architects and Engineers Registration Bill, 2025** will establish a framework for the registration, licensing, and regulation of all architects and engineers practicing in the Virgin Islands. This proposed legislation seeks to uphold the integrity of these professions and protect public safety by ensuring that practitioners meet minimum qualification standards. It is designed to address infrastructural deficiencies and safeguard the health, safety, and welfare of building occupants.
6. The **Virgin Islands Development Agency Bill, 2024** will be introduced to transition the Recovery and Development Agency to the Virgin Islands Development Agency. This change will ensure continued implementation of project interventions towards achievement of the sustainable development

goals, supporting the Territory's economic growth and success.

7. **NSDP Goal 4 - Education and Learning**
8. Madam Speaker, in the journey of nation-building, education is the ship that carries the people of the Virgin Islands forward; empowering them to navigate uncharted waters and reach for the horizon of opportunity. To remain steady and on course, it is necessary to continuously refit, reimagine, and reinforce this vessel to ensure it is equipped to weather the winds of change and deliver every Virgin Islander to a brighter future and build.
9. In this Session, the Government will continue moving *Full STEAM Ahead* with its mission to reimagine education and build a system that empowers all students - irrespective of their academic, physical, or cognitive abilities. Education must not only adapt to the needs of today, but it must anticipate the demands of tomorrow, to develop an economy that is innovative, competitive, and resilient on the global stage.
10. The **Education Amendment Act (2014) and its accompanying Regulations** will be brought forward to this Honourable House for consideration. These legislative updates will provide the framework necessary to embed Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) education into the very fabric of our system. STEAM represents more than a curriculum shift; it is a change in thinking - one that nurtures critical thinking, logical reasoning, creativity, and collaborative skills while embracing technology and connecting learning to real-world applications. By modernising this legislation, the Government is equipping the education system to foster innovation, inclusivity, and resilience, laying a solid foundation for the future of the Virgin Islands.
11. In addition, we will focus on modernising key policies that underpin our education system. The **Early Childhood Policy** will ensure our youngest learners are given every opportunity to succeed, with an emphasis on quality standards and professional development for early childhood educators. The **Special Education Policy** will work to ensure that no child is left behind by promoting inclusion and providing support for students with special needs, recognising their unique potential to contribute to society. Additionally, the **Graduation Policy** will be revised to align graduation requirements with the

competencies necessary for students to thrive in a technologically driven, interconnected world.

12. Madam Speaker, education is not confined to the classroom. Youth and sports development are critical pillars of holistic educational progress. With UNESCO's support, the Ministry will continue the review of the **National Youth Policy** to further empower our young people as leaders, innovators, and active citizens. Additionally, we will commence the review of the **National Sports Policy** to ensure that athletic development contributes to both personal growth and national pride, while promoting wellness across our communities.

1. In line with this Government's commitment to accountability, integrity, fairness, and openness, I am pleased to report that the **H. Lavity Stoutt Community College (HLSCC) Act** has been revised and assented to, paving the way for a modernised and efficient institution. The next step will be the repeal of the **BVI College Fund Act (CAP. 113)**, which no longer serves the College's needs.

1. Similarly, amendments to the **Recreation Trust Act (CAP. 278)** and the **Recreation Trust Amendment Act (No. 4 of 2012)** will be completed to ensure the Trust adheres to good governance principles while addressing the evolving needs of our communities. As the Trust works diligently to develop and maintain recreational facilities across the Territory, these legislative reforms will ensure its operations remain efficient and aligned with the principles of good governance. Alongside these amendments, the Trust will also be tasked with developing or updating policies and procedures to promote efficiency and organisational excellence.

NSDP Goal 5 - Health and Wellness

1. Madam Speaker, the Health and Wellness of the citizenry are critical to a country's sustainable development and are good indicators of effective

Government. It is therefore incumbent on Governments to enact laws and policies that promote good health and a healthy environment, and to promote the wellbeing of citizens.

2. In this Session, the House of Assembly will consider **amendments to the Tobacco Products Control Act, 2006 (No. 18 of 2006)**. In 2019, the Cabinet approved changes to the Tobacco Products Control Act to address certain issues and align the law with international standards, specifically the World Health Organization's Framework Convention for Tobacco Control. The draft Tobacco Products Control (Amendment) Bill, 2025 addresses issues such as the mandatory implementation of graphic warning labels on tobacco products, preventing tobacco sponsorship of events and activities, preventing the smoking in private transportation vehicles when minors are present, increasing the level of fines, and including provisions for Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems and Electronic Non-Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS and ENNDS).
3. The Ministry of Health and Social Development will also update a number of Regulations dealing with various aspects of Public Health. These will include:
    1. The **Environmental Health Regulations**, which address the safe operation of barber shops, spas, saloons, and beauty parlours, establishing infection control standards while ensuring medical procedures are supervised by health professionals.
    2. The **Recreational Water Regulations** pertain to establishing and enforcing water quality standards for swimming pools and other recreational water activities.
    3. The **Food Hygiene Regulations**, which will strengthen food safety measures.
    4. The **Potable Water Regulations** will set minimum standards for potable water for household and drinking use, along with enforcement measures.
    5. The **In-door Air Quality Regulations** will set minimum standards for human habitation and address complaints, while also implementing control measures for commercial air-conditioning systems.

6. The **Fats Oils and Grease Disposal Regulations** will ensure the safe disposal of fats, oils, and greases from food establishments to protect the municipal sewerage system and the public health.

4. **Amendments to the Recreation Trust Act (CAP. 278) and the Recreation Trust Amendment Act (No. 4 of 2012)** will be completed in this Session. As the Trust works diligently to develop and maintain recreational facilities across the Territory, these legislative reforms will ensure its operations remain efficient and aligned with the principles of good governance. Alongside these amendments, the Trust will also be tasked with developing or updating policies and procedures to promote efficiency and organisational excellence.
5. **Amendments will be made to the Cemeteries Act, 1987 (CAP.177) and the Burial Grounds Regulations, 1978**. The changes will cover such matters as provisions for plot reservations or sale of plots for future use, the growing cultural and religious diversity of burial rites and Burial Refundable Deposits based on the removal of debris and construction materials after burial. Additionally, provisions will also be made for the maintenance of graves and memorials. Families of the deceased will be responsible for marking and finishing the vaults, and provision will be made for assessing administration fees for burials to provide for the maintenance of burial grounds.
6. Maintaining the pristine beauty of these islands is a priority for the Government, but doing so has been met with certain challenges, such as the proliferation of derelict vehicles, littering and indiscriminate dumping of refuse. As such amendments to the **Derelict Vehicle Act** will be introduced to streamline the process for dealing with derelict vehicles and to align the disposal fees with the actual cost of collecting and safely disposing of vehicles. The **Litter Abatement Act** will be amended to increase the penalties for littering and indiscriminate dumping.
7. On another note, Madam Speaker, with the passage of the **Public Assistance Act**, there are provisions which allow for a number of prescribed areas to be defined through **Regulations**. These include income thresholds for eligibility, any other forms of emergency assistance that may be

considered necessary for persons with an urgent financial need, and other critical areas which must be clearly defined for the benefit of the end users. Work is ongoing with the support of a UNICEF Legal Expert and the Attorney General's Chambers to finalise these Regulations early in 2025. In the interim, the Ministry proposes increasing the Public Assistance Grant amounts to provide a more substantial and immediate relief to vulnerable persons in the community, while the legislative process is completed.

NSDP Goal 6 - Good Governance and Leadership

1. Madam Speaker, the Government is committed to delivering the highest standards of Good Governance to the people of the Virgin Islands. This includes not just transparency and accountability, but efficiency of service and honouring the social contract.
2. Madame Speaker, it is planned that the **Virgin Islands Constitution Order, 2025** will be presented to this Honourable House for consideration after completion of negotiations with the United Kingdom Government planned for this year. The Report of the Constitutional Review Commission will be debated in this Honourable House in the first quarter of 2025, and it is hoped that the process of finalisation of the new Constitution would be completed during this Second Session.
3. Initiatives in the Second Session of the Fifth House of Assembly will include bringing forward the **Human Rights Commission Bill** to provide for the establishment of the Virgin Islands Human Rights Commission in accordance with Section 34 of the Virgin Islands Constitution Order, 2007. This is an important part of strengthening our independent institutions.
4. The **Freedom of Information Bill** will be advanced to establish a legal right to information as an essential part of public administration in the Virgin Islands. Among its provisions will be the responsibility for public authorities to publish certain documents and information concerning, among other things, its functions, its decision-making powers, the categories of documents that are to be maintained and the documents that must be made available for inspection and purchase.

5. The Government will also introduce the **Elections Amendment Act**, which will amend the Elections Act and Regulations, to enhance and strengthen the electoral administration process by incorporating the recommendations from the Supervisor of Elections' 2023 General Elections Report and those from the Observer Mission. These amendments will serve to promote the public's level of trust in the electoral system, and the level of functioning in relation to international standards.
6. Since the **Public Procurement Act, 2021** was implemented in 2021, the Government has been able to receive feedback from the public and other users of the legislation on its effectiveness and efficiency. Accordingly, the Government intends to incorporate the feedback received to further strengthen the public procurement system. This will be in the form of an amendment to the principal Act, which will be introduced in the House of Assembly in 2025.
7. Madam Speaker, The **Whistleblower Act, 2021** will be amended to further strengthen its effectiveness. Proposals include expanding protections and streamlining the processes related to whistleblowing. The amendments will clarify that anyone can be reported for improper conduct, and the definition of improper conduct will be expanded to include human rights violations and unfair discrimination. Additionally, a centralized body, the Complaints Commissioner, will be established to oversee all disclosures, ensuring accountability and consistency in processing reports. Other notable changes include allowing anonymous disclosures, outlining conditions under which the designated authority can refuse or cease investigations, and specifying that criminal matters should be referred to the police, among other provisions.
8. Madam Speaker, the Premier's Office will continue to support the work commenced in 2024 with **amendments to the priority statutory board legislations** to ensure that their good governance provisions are strengthened. A schedule has been developed which will see amendments being done on a quarterly basis for fifteen statutory boards across ministries.
9. The **Service Commissions (Amendment) Act** will be brought forward to legally recognise the structural design of an independent, dedicated secretariat to provide support to the four (4) Service Commissions. The

amendment is also needed to redefine the role and responsibility of the Department of Human Resources and the Ministry of Education Youth Affairs and Sports considering the separation of the two. This amendment will allow the Secretariat to operate in its independent space with its own operating budget, ensuring that the Commissions can focus on their core responsibilities while the administrative, operational, and logistical support is managed independently. Further, with the passage of the Public Service Management Act, amendments to the Service Commissions Act are necessary to ensure that the Service Commissions Act and Public Service Management Act aligns.

10. The **Flexible Working Arrangements Bill**, supported by policy, will outline the criteria and process for undertaking a flexible working arrangement. The implementation of this policy will come at a time where officers and employees continue to manoeuvre through their personal hurricane recovery efforts and the challenges caused as a result pandemics and endemics.
11. Madam Speaker, in 2020, the subject of National Archives was reassigned to the Premier's Office while the subject of Records, related to the operations of the Public Service, remained with the Office of the Deputy Governor. There is a need to ensure that each subject has the relative legislative framework to govern their work. The **Archives and Records Management (Amendment) Act** will provide for the separation of the Records Management from the Archives and Records Management Act. As it relates to Records, legislation backing is needed to establish clear guidelines and standards for the creation, maintenance, retention, and disposal of records. This ensures accountability, transparency, and compliance with legal and regulatory frameworks. Proper records management supports effective governance by preserving institutional memory, facilitating efficient decision making, and protecting sensitive or classified information.
12. To support the Royal Virgin Islands Police Force in their law enforcement role, the **Police Act (CAP.165)** will be revisited. This Act brings together an updated legislative basis for policing in the Territory and provides a strong constitutional and professional base for a modernised Police Force. Supporting the proposed Act represents a positive and measured response to

the current crime and community challenges facing the Virgin Islands and provides a real opportunity for the RVIPF to emerge as a leading police force in the Caribbean.

13. **Witness Anonymity Legislation** will also be brought forward. This will ensure the protection of witnesses and the preservation of their rights by the provision for a court to make a witness anonymity order to protect the safety of the witness, prevent damage to property, and prevent actual harm to the public interest. This legislation will be an invaluable tool in assisting with combating serious crime and help to re-establish public confidence in the criminal justice system.
14. Madam Speaker, substantial efforts have been made towards drafting a Sexual Offences Bill. The Sexual Offenses Bill aims to create a legal framework that is sensitive to gender issues concerning various sexual crimes and aims to reduce secondary trauma for victims, as well as monitoring sexual offenders after their release. It will cover procedures for investigation, prosecution, and sentencing, while offering support to complainants and survivors. The Act will align the Virgin Islands with international standards for sexual offense laws by defining terms clearly and focusing on preventing gender-based violence. In 2023, the Attorney General's Chambers submitted seven supporting Bills to aid in enacting the Sexual Offences Bill. These include:
    1. Sexual Offender Register Bill, 2024
    2. Offences Against the Persons (Amendment) Bill, 2024
    3. Evidence (Amendment) Bill, 2024
    4. Criminal Code (Amendment) Bill, 2024
    5. Criminal Justice (Alternative Sentencing) Bill, 2024
    6. Computer Misuse and Cyber Crime (Amendment) Bill, 2024
    7. Children and Young Persons (Amendment) Bill, 2024.
15. The **Sexual Offences Bill, 2025** and the **Parole (Amendment) Bill** will be brought to the House of Assembly during this Session for deliberation. The public and all stakeholders will be consulted as the legislation goes through the required process.

16. Measures will be pursued to improve the efficiency of the court system. The **Criminal Procedures Rules** (the Criminal Rules), like the Civil Procedure Rules, will serve a vital role in managing all criminal matters filed within the Supreme Court. The Criminal Rules will make provisions for filing dates and deadlines for certain matters, case management procedures, disclosure, adjournments, bail, and service of documents, among other matters.
17. The **Magistrate's Code of Procedure Rules** will be amended to allow persons to be served summons electronically or by mail. This will provide significant benefits in terms of efficiency, accessibility, and compliance. Both delivery methods will help reduce administrative costs associated with manual processes, such as printing and in-person delivery. Additionally, they allow for standardised record-keeping, ensuring that there is a clear and verifiable history of communications.
18. The **Magistrate's Code of Procedure (Amendment) Act** will seek to authorise the Cabinet to make rules for the just and expeditious management and dissolution of all criminal cases in the Magistrate's Court. This adjustment ensures that the local Magistracy can adopt the finalised Criminal Rules while accommodating its unique operational framework.
19. Legislation to provide for **Restorative Justice** as an option in the criminal justice system for victims, offenders, and the community, will be introduced in this Session. The Act will also provide for the establishment of an Advisory Council on Restorative Justice and for related matters. Restorative Justice legislation formalises processes that focus on repairing harm caused by criminal behaviour as an alternative to the traditional punitive justice system, by emphasising accountability, reconciliation, and healing for all stakeholders, including victims, offenders, and the community.

Madam Speaker, in closing, the Government of the Virgin Islands also wishes for the public to be aware that it is not unusual that, during the year, new initiatives arise which may make it necessary to prepare new legislation or amend, where appropriate. When this happens, the necessary legislation will be brought forward by the Government for the consideration of the House of Assembly to further

strengthen all sectors of the community the Virgin Islands.

As Governor, I look forward to continuing to fulfil my responsibilities under the Constitution regarding the elected Government’s legislative agenda, in the best interest of the people of the Virgin Islands and their good governance.

I hereby declare the Second Session of the Fifth House of Assembly of the House of Assembly open.

May God guide the deliberations of this Honourable House as you work on behalf of the people of these Virgin Islands.

Thank you.