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TRUANCY BILL TO BE HEARD IN WEDNESDAY'S COMMITTEE HEARING; FRANCIS SAYS BILL WILL PROTECT OUR CHILDREN

St. Croix, V.I. – With the introduction of Bill 32-0014, Senator Novelle E. Francis, Jr. said he is hoping to strengthen the current truancy laws and reduce the number of students across the territory who are chronically late or absent from classes on a daily basis.

Bill 32-0014, sponsored by Francis, is an Act amending title 17 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 9, section 86 relating to school attendance, absenteeism and parental responsibility. The bill will be heard when the Committee on Education, Youth and Recreation meets on St. Croix Wednesday.

“On any given day, we see school-aged children roaming in the streets during the time that they should be in school. They are out walking dogs, riding horses and sometimes even loitering in shopping centers,” Francis said. “Truancy can also play a significant role in the school to prison pipeline. Students who are missing time in the classroom are losing out on their education and putting their futures at risk. It is time that we get a handle on it and do something that would truly create a system of accountability.”

Senator Francis said the law, in its current state does not have a true chain of command or step-by-step process for accountability or disciplinary action to take place and protect our children. “I anticipate the support of my colleagues on this bill as we all focus on students and their development,” he said. “Truancy is sometimes a result of instability, neglect or abuse in a household and working to identify and address these causes not only supports education, but could also save our children from undue harm.”

Francis said key stake holders, including Commissioner of Education, Police Commissioner, Human Services Commissioner, Board of Education Chairperson, President of AFT Local 1826 and Virgin Islands Bar Association Executive Director have all been invited to testify on the bill.

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