

COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AGRICULTURE
AND PLANNING

03/09/15-AMENDED AND REPORTED OUT TO THE FLOOR

03/05/15-AMENDED AND REPORTED OUT TO THE COMMITTEE ON RULES AND JUDICIARY

02/23/2015-HELD IN COMMITTEE

BILL NO. 31-0009

Thirty-first Legislature of the Virgin Islands

February 4, 2015

An Act amending title 29 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 12 adding subchapter IV relating to sustainable tourism through art-based revenue stream production

PROPOSED BY: Senators Clifford F. Graham, Myron D. Jackson, Kenneth L. Gittens
and Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly
Co sponsors: Janette Millin Young and Novelle E. Francis, Jr.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands:

SECTION 1. Title 29 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 12 is amended by adding subchapter IV to read as follows:

“SUBCHAPTER IV Sustainable Tourism Through Arts-Based Revenue Stream Production for the Film Industry

§750. Purpose.

(a) The purposes of this subchapter are to enhance the Virgin Islands' economy by revitalizing and expanding the attraction of the film, video, and other media recording, motion picture, and television industries and related media productions to the Virgin Islands and to promote the growth of Virgin Islands small businesses related to and servicing these industries.

The objectives of this subchapter are to:

(1) Renew interest in the Virgin Islands as a premier location for the production of motion pictures, documentaries, television programs and digital media, webcast, any new media format programs, commercials, and music videos and magazine advertising by off-island production companies;

(2) Encourage the creation of jobs that pay well for Virgin Islands workers and university graduates;

(3) Enhance the growth of the Virgin Islands businesses that provide goods and services for these types of productions;

(4) Assist local filmmakers; and

(5) Help promote the tourism industry in the Virgin Islands.

(b) The Legislature declares that the objectives of subsection (a) are best achieved by offering tax incentives or other offsets to production companies for hiring Virgin Islands residents, for purchasing Virgin Islands goods and services, and for filming and recording in the territory.

§751. Definitions. As used in this subchapter, the term:

(a) "Affiliate" means an entity that is included in the production company's affiliated group, as defined 26 U.S.C. §1504(a), and any other entity that is directly or indirectly owned 50 percent or more by a member of the affiliated group.

(b) "Application Fee" means a fee to be paid by an applicant for Incentives to the Economic Development Authority pursuant to regulations promulgated under this subchapter.

(c) "Base investment" means the aggregate funds actually expended by a Production Company as Qualified Production Expenditures incurred in this Territory which are directly used in a Territory Certified Production.

(d) "Compensation" means salary, wages, or other compensation, including related benefits paid to and on behalf of Virgin Islands residents.

(e) "Incentives" includes the rebates, credits, waivers or other offsets available under this subchapter.

(g) "New media" means the development, usually electronic, forms of visual and audio communication media regarded as on-demand electronic mass media on an interactive platform combined with computerized devices.

(h) "Production Company" means a company primarily engaged in Qualified Production Activities that have been approved by the Economic Development Authority and the Office of Film and Music Promotion of the Department of Tourism. The term does not include any form of business owned, affiliated, or controlled, in whole or in part, by any company or person that is in default on any tax obligation of the Territory, or a loan made by the Territory or a loan guaranteed by the Territory.

(i) "Qualified Production Expenditures" means preproduction, including scouting activities, production, postproduction expenditures incurred in this Territory that are directly used in a Qualified Production Activity. This term does not include postproduction expenditures for marketing and distribution of a project unless these functions are implemented in the Territory and utilize local goods and services.

(j) "Qualified Virgin Islands Promotion" means a qualified promotion of this Territory approved by the Economic Development Authority and the Office of Film and Music Promotion of the Department of Tourism and as described in the regulations promulgated hereunder consisting of a:

- (1) Qualified movie production that includes any reference to or identification of the Virgin Islands or contains credits within its presentation as being made in the Virgin Island;

1 (2) Qualified television production that includes any reference to or
2 identification of the Virgin Islands, or contains credits within its presentation as being
3 made in the Virgin Islands.

4 (3) Qualified music video that includes any reference to or identification of the
5 Virgin Islands or contains credits within its presentation as being made in the Virgin
6 Islands.

7 (4) Qualified interactive game that includes any reference to or identification
8 of the Virgin Islands or contains credits within its presentation as being made in the Virgin
9 Island; or

10 (5) Qualified new media format program, including digital media, webcast,
11 and on-demand access video which includes any reference to or identification of the
12 Virgin Islands, or contains credits within its presentation as being made in the US Virgin
13 Islands.

14 (k) "Qualified Production Activity" means the production of new film, video, or
15 digital projects produced in this Territory and approved by the Economic Development Authority
16 and the Office of Film and Music Promotion of the Department of Tourism, such as feature films,
17 television series, movies for television, digital release, webcasts, commercials, music videos,
18 interactive entertainment or sound recording projects used in feature films, TV series, or movies
19 for television, webcasts, commercials , music videos, interactive entertainment, including, but not
20 limited to:

21 (1) Projects recorded in this Territory, in whole or in part, in either short or
22 long form, animation or music, fixed on a delivery system which includes without
23 limitation film; videotape, computer disc, laser disc, and any element of the digital
24 domain, from which the program is viewed or reproduced, and which is intended for
25 multimarket commercial distribution via theaters; licensing for exhibition by individual

1 television stations, groups of stations, networks, cable television stations, public
2 broadcasting stations, corporations, live venues, the Internet, or any other channel of
3 exhibition;

4 (2) Storyboard preparation, scripting, art direction, set construction and
5 operation;

6 (3) Wardrobe, make-up, accessories, and related services;

7 (4) Costs associated with cinematography, photography and sound
8 synchronization, lighting, and related services and materials;

9 (5) Editing and related services; rental of facilities and equipment; leasing of
10 vehicles;

11 (6) Costs of food and lodging;

12 (7) Digital or tape editing, film processing, transfers of film to tape or digital
13 format, sound mixing, computer graphics services, special effects services, and animation
14 services;

15 (8) Total aggregate payroll; airfare, if purchased through a Virgin Islands
16 based travel agency or travel company; insurance costs and bonding, if purchased through
17 an insurance agency licensed in the Virgin Islands;

18 (9) Professional services, including legal, accounting, payroll, consulting and
19 security; and

20 (10) Other direct costs of producing the project in accordance with generally
21 accepted entertainment industry practices.

22 (l) "Resident" means an individual as designated in section 703(e) of this title.

23 (m) "Resident Production Company" means a production company that has been
24 organized under the laws of the Virgin Islands, is headquartered in the Virgin Islands and licensed

to do business in the Virgin Islands and undertakes projects that are originated or produced locally by a Virgin Islands resident filmmaker or videographer.

(n) "Territory" means the Virgin Islands, as defined in section 2 (a) of the Revised Organic Act of the Virgin Islands, 48 U.S.C. 1541(a).

(o) "Territory Certified Production" means a production engaged in Qualified Production Activities whose application for Incentives has been approved by the Economic Development Authority and the Office of Film and Music Promotion of the Department of Tourism in accordance with regulations promulgated pursuant to this subchapter.

(p) "Total aggregate payroll" means the total sum expended by a Production Company on salaries paid to Virgin Islands resident employees working within this Territory in a Territory Certified Production or Productions. For purposes of this subsection:

(1) With respect to a single employee, the portion of any compensation which exceeds \$500,000 for a single production shall not be included when calculating total aggregate payroll; and

(2) All payments to a single employee and any legal entity in which the employee has any direct or indirect ownership interest must be considered as having been paid to the employee and must be aggregated regardless of the means of payment or distribution.

§752. Office of Entertainment Production Incentives.

(a) There is established within the Virgin Islands Economic Development Authority, an Office of Entertainment Production Incentives that in partnership with the Office of Film and Music Promotion of the Department of Tourism is responsible for managing applications for Incentives under this Program.

(b) The Chief Executive Officer of the Economic Development Authority shall oversee the office and be responsible for managing applications for incentives provided in this subchapter.

(c) Funding for the establishment of the Incentives and attendant office at the Economic Development Authority must be budgeted from the operational funds of the Economic Development Authority; and the payment of rebates provided for in this subchapter must be funded from the Tourism Advertising Revolving Fund, 33 V.I.C. § 3072, at a maximum of 20 percent of the previous year's funding appropriated annually or a minimum of \$2,500,000 per year.

(d) The Economic Development Authority may establish an educational scholarship fund that must be administered jointly with the Virgin Islands Board of Education to provide scholarships for film- and music recording-related educational programs for Residents.

§752a. Relationship of Office of Entertainment Production Incentives and the Office of Film and Music Promotion.

(a) The Office of Film and Music Promotion of the Department of Tourism in concurrence with the Economic Development Authority is responsible for the creation of the application and shall assist in the review of each application. The Economic Development Authority shall serve as the initial point of contact for interested parties.

(b) Once a complete application has been received by the Economic Development Authority, the application for Incentives under this subchapter must be forwarded to the Office of Film and Music Promotion not later than 10 business days after the receipt of the completed application for its review, analysis, and recommendation to the Economic Development Authority. The Office of Film and Music Promotion has 7 business days from receipt of the application in which to submit its analysis and recommendation to the Economic Development Authority.

(c) Upon receipt by the Economic Development Authority of the Film and Music Promotion analysis and recommendation, the Economic Development Authority has 25 business days in which to approve or reject the application in writing to the applicant.

(d) Upon the approval of the Economic Development Authority of the application the Economic Development Authority shall proceed to issue the appropriate certificate setting forth the particular terms of the Incentives granted.

§753. Qualification for tax incentive benefits.

(a) In order to qualify and remain eligible for tax incentive benefits under this subchapter, an applicant must:

(1) Be a Resident Production Company or a non-Virgin Islands entity that has obtained a license to do business in the Territory under 27 VIC §302.

(2) Expend a minimum of \$250,000 on Qualified Production Activities for each Territory Certified Production;

(3) Employ residents of the Virgin Islands as defined in section 703(e) of this title such that a minimum of 20% of the total employees working on the production in the Virgin Islands, including extras, day players, and a maximum of three paid interns who must be residents of the Virgin Islands, unless a documented waiver request is submitted to the Economic Development Authority upon a requisite showing according to regulations promulgated;

(4) Include in the credits of any production language such as the following: “Made or Filmed in the Virgin Islands” or some other designation where the entire production is not completed in the U.S. Virgin Islands, that footage was shot in the territory: “Portions Made in the U.S. Virgin Islands” or in the case of a footage shot in St. Croix “Portions Made or Filmed in St. Croix” and an acknowledgement to the VI Economic Development Authority and the Office of Film and Music Promotion of the

1 Department of Tourism, as more specifically defined in regulations promulgated
2 hereunder; and

3 (5) Agree that a member of the executive production crew, including but not
4 limited to the director, producer, production supervisor, writer and department heads shall
5 make themselves available to the Economic Development Authority to speak to local
6 school and university students about music/film/entertainment topics pertinent to the film
7 or video industry applicable to the applicant, where practicable.

8 (b) The Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs shall process a business
9 license application for the production company applicant not later than 15 business days after the
10 applicant's submitting a completed application to the Department of Licensing and Consumer
11 Affairs. If a determination as to the propriety of the issuance of a business license is not made
12 within 15 days, the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs shall issue a temporary
13 license to the applicant entitling the applicant to commence business at the expiration of the
14 fifteen-working-days period, allowing it to conduct business as if in receipt of a valid business
15 license for a period not exceeding 60 days pending completion of the process by the Department
16 of Licensing and Consumer Affairs.

17 (c) The Economic Development Authority shall prescribe regulations, including a
18 procedure for review of the denial or revocation of the certifications, necessary to carry out the
19 provisions of this subchapter. The final decision regarding the denial or revocation of the
20 certifications under this subchapter must be made by the Economic Development Authority

21 (d) The Qualified production must begin no later than 180 days after issuance of the
22 Certificate; and the Certificate expire 180 days after issuance, unless an extension is granted by
23 the Economic Development Authority.

24 (e) Each applicant shall pay an Application Fee as established in the regulations under
25 this subchapter.

§753a. Eligible Incentives Granted

(a) Each Qualified Production Company, both resident and nonresident, is eligible for the Incentives provided in this section upon meeting the requirements of section 753; each Qualified Production Company may select one or more of the following Incentives:

(1) A production company that has submitted an application for Incentives and has been approved is allowed a tax credit based on the taxes imposed by and payable to the Territory for the employment of residents of this Territory in connection with a Territory Certified Production. The aggregate of the credit allowed as an offset under this section against any income tax or other tax obligation, except any employee withholding tax, of the Qualified Production Company for a production occurring in the production company's tax year is within the range of 10 to 17% of the actual compensation paid in connection with the Territory Certified Production during the tax year as provided in this section.

(2) The percentage of available tax credit in paragraph (1) is determined in accordance with the following:

(A) Where 20 to 25% of the total workforce, including paid interns, of the production company employed in the Territory are Virgin Islands residents, the allowable percentage is 10%;

(B) Where 25.1 to 30% of the total workforce including paid interns, of the production company employed in the Territory are Virgin Islands residents, the allowable percentage is 15%; and

(C) Where 30.1% or greater of the total workforce, including paid interns, of the production company employed in the territory are Virgin Islands residents, the allowable percentage is 17%.

(3) A production company that has submitted an application for Incentives is allowed a cash rebate for Qualified Production Expenditures made in connection with a Territory Certified

1 Production. First priority for any cash rebate is for Resident Production Companies under the
2 regulations promulgated hereunder. The rebate allowed under this section is equal up to 9 percent
3 of the total Qualified Production Expenditures incurred in connection with the Territory Certified
4 Production during the tax year up to a maximum of \$500,000.

5 (4) The production company is allowed an additional cash rebate equal to 10 percent
6 of the total Qualified Production Expenditures if the Territory Certified Production includes a
7 Qualified Virgin Islands Promotion.

8 (5) The production company is allowed an additional cash rebate equal to 10 percent
9 of the total Qualified Production Expenditures if the Qualified Production Activities are
10 undertaken on the island of St. Croix.

11 (6) Notwithstanding 33 V.I.C. §54, and 29 V.I.C. §747e, a reduction in the payment
12 of Hotel Tax rates may be applied as follows to both resident and nonresident production
13 companies:

14 (A) For a minimum Qualified Production Expenditure of \$250,000 and hotel
15 stay over 150 room-nights, the Production Company shall pay hotel tax at a rate of 8%;

16 (B) For a Qualified Production Expenditure of between \$250,001 and \$500,000
17 and hotel stay over 250 room nights the Production Company shall pay hotel tax at a rate
18 of 6%;

19 (C) For a Qualified Production Expenditure of between \$500,001 and \$750,000
20 and hotel stay over 350 room nights the Production Company shall pay hotel tax at a rate
21 of 4%;

22 (D) For a Qualified Production Expenditure of between \$750,001 and
23 \$1,000,000 and hotel stay over 450 room nights the Production Company shall pay hotel
24 tax at a rate of 3%; and

(E) For a Qualified Production Expenditure of at least \$1,000,001 and hotel stay over 1000 rooms' nights, the Production Company shall pay tax at a rate of 1.5%.

(b) Resident Production Companies are eligible for tax incentives and rebates provided for in subsection (a) up to a maximum of \$350,000 per annum, per project, if they meet all requirements of this subchapter.

(c) Nothing in this subchapter prohibits a resident production company from applying for benefits under any other Economic Development Authority tax incentive program.

753b Procedure for application for tax incentives

(a) The tax liabilities for income meeting the requirements of section 753a may be reduced or rebated pursuant to the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended, and as applicable to the Virgin Islands by offsets to Qualified Production Expenditures and taxes payable to the Territory.

(b) The tax credit granted under section 753a is subject to the following conditions and limitations:

(1) The tax credit may be taken beginning with the taxable year in which the Production Company has met the investment requirement. For each year in which the Production Company either claims or transfers the tax credit the Production Company shall attach a schedule to the Production Company's Virgin Islands income tax return which must set forth the following information, as a minimum:

(A) A description of the Qualified Production Activities, along with the certification from the Economic Development Authority;

(B) A detailed listing of the employee's names Social Security numbers and Virgin Islands wages when salaries are included in the Base Investment;

(C) The amount of tax credit claimed for the current taxable year;

(D) The amount of tax credit utilized by the Production Company in the current taxable year; and

(E) The amount of tax credit to be carried over to subsequent tax years.

(2) The Production Company that claims the tax credit granted in this section shall include in the description of the Qualified Production Activities required by subparagraph (A) of paragraph (1) information that demonstrates that the activities included in the base investment or excess base investment equal or exceed \$500,000 during such year.

(c) The Economic Development Authority shall promulgate such regulations as are necessary to administer this section.

(d) Each qualifying Production Company undertaking a Territory Certified Production and granted a certificate is subject to an audit by the Economic Development Authority on completion of the Qualified Production Activity to ensure that the Qualified Production Company has met the terms of its application and certificate.

§753c. Sale or transfer of tax credits

(a) Any tax credits with respect to a Territory Certified Production earned by a Production Company and previously claimed but not used by such Production Company against its income tax or other tax liability may be transferred or sold in whole or in part by such Production Company to another Virgin Islands taxpayer, subject to the following conditions:

(1) The Production Company may make only a single transfer or sale of tax credits earned in a taxable year; however, the transfer or sale may involve one or more transferees;

(2) The Production Company shall submit to the Economic Development Authority and to the Virgin Islands Bureau of Internal Revenue a written notification of any transfer or sale of tax credits not later than 30 days after the transfer or sale of such tax

1 credits. The notification must include the Production Company's tax credit balance prior
2 to transfer, the credit certificate number, the remaining balance after transfer, all tax
3 identification numbers for each transferee, the date of transfer, the amount transferred, and
4 any other information required by the Economic Development Authority or the Virgin
5 Islands Bureau of Internal Revenue;

6 (3) The Virgin Islands Bureau of Internal Revenue shall disallow tax credits to
7 any Production Company that fails to comply with this subsection until the Production
8 Company is in full compliance;

9 (4) The transfer or sale of this tax credit does not extend the time in which such
10 tax credit may be used. The carry-forward period for tax credit that is transferred or sold
11 begins on the date on which the tax credit was originally earned;

12 (5) A transferee has only the rights to claim and use the tax credit which were
13 available to the Production Company at the time of the transfer. To the extent that the
14 Production Company did not have rights to claim or use the tax credit at the time of the
15 transfer, the Virgin Islands Bureau of Internal Revenue shall either disallow the tax credit
16 claimed by the transferee or recapture the tax credit from the transferee. The transferee's
17 recourse is against the Production Company; and

18 (6) The transferee must acquire the tax credits in this section for a minimum of
19 60 percent of the amount of the tax credits so transferred.

20 (b) Any Production Company claiming, transferring, or selling the tax credit shall
21 reimburse the Government of the Virgin Islands for any department initiated audits relating to the
22 tax credit. This subsection does not apply to routine tax audits of a taxpayer which may include
23 the review of the tax credit provided in this subchapter.”

24 **BILL SUMMARY**

1 This Bill adds a new subchapter to title 29, chapter 12, that grants tax credits and rebates
2 to qualified production companies that produce new film, video, music video, or digital projects
3 produced in the Territory, Incentives, which are only granted after a threshold spend is reached,
4 include a cash rebate of up to 9% of total qualified expenditures, additional cash rebates of up to
5 10% of the total qualified expenditures for Qualified Virgin Islands Promotions and productions
6 on St. Croix, and an additional tax credit based upon the hiring of Virgin Islands residents; and a
7 hotel tax reduction. By tying certain amount of the credits to local hiring, the legislation ensures
8 that the Territory's residents benefit from the use of the credit by non-USVI production
9 companies. The statute also provides for the transferability of certain credits to third parties,
10 which increases the attractiveness of the incentive program.

11 Production Incentives have become common in the film, commercials, video and music
12 production industry and serve as a key element for attracting such productions to the Territory.
13 This incentives program follows the general guidelines of other programs in the United States
14 and seeks to make the Virgin Islands competitive with such other programs.

15
16 **BR15-0028/January 16, 2015/AA/Reviewed by YLT**

17 <T:\AMENDS\31st Legislature\31-287.docx>

18 <T:\AMENDS\31st Legislature\31-260-Graham.docx>
19
20
21
22
23
24
25