

No. 6 of 2024

VIRGIN ISLANDS

IMMIGRATION AND PASSPORT (AMENDMENT) ACT, 2024

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No. 6 of 2024

**Immigration and Passport
(Amendment) Act, 2024**

**Virgin
Islands**

I ASSENT

**(Sgd.) Daniel Pruce
Governor,
1st November, 2024**

VIRGIN ISLANDS

No. 6 of 2024

AN ACT TO AMEND IMMIGRATION AND PASSPORT ACT, REVISED EDITION 2013.

[Gazetted 7th November, 2024]

ENACTED by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands as follows:

Short title and commencement

1. This Act may be cited as the Immigration and Passport (Amendment) Act, 2024 and shall come into force on a date appointed by the Minister by Notice published in the *Gazette*.

Section 2 amended

2. The Immigration and Passport Act, Revised Edition 2013 (hereafter referred to as the “principal Act”) is amended in section 2 by inserting in the appropriate order, the following definition:

““Committee” means the immigration Quota-setting Committee established by section 15A;”.

Section 7 amended

3. The principal Act is amended in section 7

- (a) in paragraph (d) by deleting the word “or” appearing at the end of the paragraph;
- (b) by inserting immediately after paragraph (e) the following new paragraphs:
 - “(f) impersonates another person or misrepresents their identity or relationship to other persons including their family members;

- (g) obstructs the immigration officer from performing his or her functions under the Act; or
- (h) interferes with any investigation or decision making process including tampering with any evidence, coercing witnesses or attempting to unduly influence members of the Board.”

Section 12 amended

4. The principal Act is amended in section 12 by deleting the words “administration and discipline” and substituting with the words “day-to-day operations.”

Section 13 amended

5. The principal Act is amended in section 13

- (a) in subsection (1),
 - (i) by deleting the word “Governor” and substituting with the word “Minister”;
 - (ii) by deleting the word “Minister” and substituting with the word “Cabinet”; and
 - (iii) by deleting the word “advice” and substituting the word “approval”;
- (b) by inserting a new subsection (1a) as follows:

“(1a) The members of the Board shall consist of persons who are deemed to belong to the Territory under section 2(2) of the Virgin Islands (Constitution) Order, who each hold a certificate of belonger status under section 16 for 20 years or more.”;
- (c) by inserting a new subsection (2) as follows:

“(2) One of the members referred to in subsection (1) shall be nominated by the Premier and another by the Leader of the Opposition.”
- (d) in subsection (2)(a),
 - (i) by deleting the word “Governor” and substituting with the word “Minister”;
 - (ii) by deleting the word “Minister” and substituting with the word “Cabinet”; and
 - (iii) by deleting the word “advice” and substituting with the word “approval”;
- (e) in subsection (2)(b), by deleting the word “Governor” and substituting with the word “Minister”;
- (f) in subsection (3),
 - (i) by deleting the word “Governor” and substituting with the word “Minister”;
 - (ii) by deleting the word “Minister” and substituting with the word “Board”;

- (iii) by deleting the word “advice” and substituting with the word “approval”; and
- (g) in subsection (7) by deleting the word “ Governor” and substituting with the word “Minister”.

Section 14 amended

6. The principal Act is amended in section 14 by inserting immediately after subsection (2) the following new subsections:

“(3) The Board shall

- (a) subject to approval by Cabinet establish a point-based system that shall be applied for the determination of applications made under sections 16 and 18 of this Act;
- (b) review applications for residence and believer status that require detailed assessment and make recommendations based on established criteria for reviewing such applications and to ensure that each case is evaluated in accordance with this Act and any other enactment;
- (c) subject to approval by Cabinet, provide oversight of the implementation of immigration policies with respect to grant of residence and believer status to ensure that the policies are administered effectively and consistently;
- (d) advise on the immigration quota limits set by the Committee;
- (e) based on the national development priorities issued by the Cabinet, recommend the annual immigration quotas for believer or residence certificates in accordance with the quota-setting objectives and the capacity of the Territory;
- (f) assess the impact of immigration quota allocations and recommend adjustments and ensure that immigration quotas align with national development priorities; and
- (g) monitor the effectiveness of quota allocations and provide feedback for policy review in order to maintain a balanced and sustainable approach to immigration.

(4) The point-based system referred to in paragraph (a) shall, on approval by Cabinet, be published by the Minister by Order in the *Gazette*.

(5) The Board shall submit to the Cabinet an annual report indicating among other things, recommendations made by the Board regarding immigration moratoriums, annual quotas by category and the grant of believer and residence status.”

Part IIIA inserted

7. The principal Act is amended by inserting immediately after section 15 the following new Part:

“PART IIIA
ESTABLISHMENT, FUNCTIONS AND POWERS OF THE
IMMIGRATION QUOTA- SETTING COMMITTEE

Establishment of Immigration Quota-setting Committee

15A. There is established by this Act an Immigration Quota-setting Committee.

Composition of the Committee

15B. (1) The Committee shall comprise not less than 7 and not more than 11 members appointed by the Minister, by instrument in writing, with the approval of the Cabinet as follows:

- (a) the Chief Immigration Officer or his or her designate who shall be a senior officer, *ex officio*;
- (b) not more than 10 other persons, from among persons with knowledge, experience and expertise in demographics, labour market analysis, economics, immigration policy, physical infrastructure, education, health and other areas.

(2) The Minister may, in addition to the Chief Immigration Officer, appoint no more than 5 of the persons referred to in paragraph (b) as *ex officio* members.

(3) The Minister shall appoint 1 of the members of the Committee to be the Chairperson of the Committee and another to be the Deputy Chairperson.

(4) The Minister shall designate a Secretary for the Committee.

(5) The Secretary shall keep the minutes and issue correspondence as directed by the Committee and perform such other duties, as may be assigned by the Chairperson.

Functions of the Committee

15C. The Committee shall, subject to the approval of Cabinet, be responsible for

- (a) gathering and analysing data on the population, demographic trends, labour market conditions, and housing availability among other factors;
- (b) defining categories of residence certificates and the eligibility criteria and qualifications for residence certificates;
- (c) engaging and carrying out stakeholder consultations to ensure transparency in any quota-setting activities;
- (d) assessing the potential economic and social impact of residence or longer certificates;

- (e) based on the analysis and stakeholder input, recommending to the Board annual immigration quotas for residence or belonging certificates in accordance with the quota-setting objectives and the capacity of the Territory;
- (f) establishing a system of monitoring the issuance of residence or belonging certificates and tracking the utilisation of the certificates annually;
- (g) reviewing the effectiveness of the immigration quota system and evaluating its impact on population growth, the economy and social integration;
- (h) adjusting the quotas as needed to address emerging challenges or changing priorities;
- (i) communicating the annual residence and belonging quotas to the public in the *Gazette*;
- (j) reporting on the utilisation of quotas, outcomes and any changes or adjustments made to facilitate transparency and accountability in the quota-setting process and any changes or adjustments made; and
- (k) conducting periodic review and revision of the quota-setting process and making necessary changes to ensure that the process remains relevant to the national development priorities and evolving immigration dynamics.

Meetings of the Committee

15D. (1) The Chairperson shall preside at the meetings of the Committee and in his or her absence the Deputy Chairperson shall preside.

(2) Where the Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson are both absent, the members shall appoint a person from among their number to be Chairperson of that meeting.

(3) The quorum of the Committee shall be half of the Committee plus 1 of the members.

(4) The Committee shall meet at least once every 4 months and at such other times as may be necessary for the purpose of performing its functions.

(5) At any meeting for the conduct of its business, the Committee shall take its decision by a majority vote of the members present and in the event of a tie, the Chairperson or the Deputy Chairperson as the case may be, shall have a casting vote.

(6) Notwithstanding anything contained in this section, the Chairperson may, in any matter he or she considers exceptional, make arrangements for a decision of the Committee to be taken on such matter through a process of consultation without the need for an actual meeting.

(7) In the conduct of its meetings, the Committee shall regulate its own procedure.

(8) The Committee may co-opt such persons as it considers competent to provide advice as the Committee considers fit, but the persons co-opted shall have no voting rights or exercise any of the powers of a member of the Committee.

Disclosure of interests

15E. (1) Where a matter is to be decided by the Committee at a meeting, any member present at the meeting who has an interest in the matter shall, at the meeting, disclose the nature of the interest in advance of any consideration of the matter.

(2) Where a member discloses an interest under this section

- (a) the disclosure shall be recorded in the minutes of the meeting; and
- (b) the member shall not, unless the Committee otherwise determines
 - (i) be present during any deliberations by the Committee relating to the matter; or
 - (ii) take part in any decision of the Committee relating to the matter.

Tenure of office

15F. (1) A member of the Committee, other than an *ex officio* member, shall hold office for a period not exceeding 3 years but is eligible for reappointment for not more than 2 consecutive terms.

(2) A member of the Committee may resign his or her office by giving one month's notice to the Minister.

(3) The Minister may by written notice, remove a member, other than an *ex officio* member, from office if satisfied that the member

- (a) has, without consent of the Committee, been absent from 3 consecutive meetings of which the member has had notice;
- (b) is adjudged bankrupt and has not been discharged;
- (c) has been convicted of an indictable offence or any offence involving dishonesty;
- (d) is of unsound mind or is certified by a medical practitioner to be so ill as not to properly discharge his or her functions under this Act.

Seats of members when vacant

15G. (1) If a member dies, resigns, is removed from or otherwise vacates his or her office prior to the expiry of the term for which he or

she has been appointed, the Minister shall appoint a new member to replace him or her.

(2) An appointment of a new member under subsection (1) may be for the unexpired period of the term of office of the member in whose place he or she is appointed for a new term not exceeding 3 years.

Immigration Quota-setting report

15H. (1) The Committee shall, within 3 months after the end of every year, submit to the Minister an immigration quota-setting report of the performance of its functions during the year including any recommendations the Committee makes and the Minister shall submit the report to the Board for advice.

(2) The report referred to in subsection (1) shall be laid in the House of Assembly and the quotas shall be subject to an affirmative resolution of the House of Assembly.

Remuneration of Committee members

15I. (1) A member of the Committee who is not a public officer may be paid such remuneration as Cabinet may determine.

(2) A person co-opted to a meeting of the Committee pursuant to section 15D(7), or any person not being a member of the Committee shall be paid such remuneration as the Cabinet may determine in consultation with the Committee.”

Section 16 amended

8. The principal Act is amended in section 16

(a) in subsection (3)(c) by deleting the reference to the number “10” and substituting with the number “20”;

(b) by inserting immediately after subsection (7), the following new provision:

“(7a) A spouse who obtains believer status under subsection (6) or (7) is prohibited from passing that believer status to a new spouse.”

(c) in subsection (8), by inserting immediately after paragraph (b) the following new paragraphs:

“(ba) the applicant is committed to protecting the environment and sustainable practices dedicated to preserving the natural beauty and ecological balance of the Virgin Islands;

(bb) the applicant has undergone comprehensive background checks to ensure that the security and safety of the Territory is safeguarded;

(bc) the applicant has exhibited community participation and solidarity;

- (bd) the applicant is committed to respect for cultural heritage and integration and has exhibited a willingness to engage in cultural and social orientation;
- (be) the applicant has demonstrated inclusivity and respect for diversity; and
- (bf) the applicant is supported by positive personal and professional references.”
- (d) in subsection (9)(a)(i) by deleting the number “900” and substituting with the number “1800”:
- (e) by deleting subsection (9)(b) and substituting with the following new paragraph:
 - “(b) the number of days on which he or she was absent from the Territory in the relevant period does not exceed 90 days in any period of 12 months;”;
- (f) by inserting immediately after subsection (10) the following new subsections:
 - “(11) A person who submits false or altered documents in support of an application for belonger status under section 16(1) commits an offence and shall on summary conviction be liable to pay a fine of \$15,000 and the person is prohibited from reapplying for a certificate of belonger status for a period of 7 years from the date on which the fine is paid.
 - (12) The Department of Immigration shall publish an annual report on decisions made by the Cabinet regarding the grant of belonger status.
 - (13) The Department shall publish a list of persons granted belonger status under this section in the *Gazette*.”

Section 18 amended

9. The principal Act is amended in section 18

- (a) in subsection (1), by deleting the word “and” and inserting immediately after paragraph (a) the following new paragraph:
 - “(b) has been ordinarily resident in the Territory for 10 consecutive years; and”;
- (b) by inserting immediately after subsection (4) the following new subsections:
 - “(5) In deciding whether a certificate should be granted pursuant to subsection (1) or (2) in respect of any applicant, the Cabinet shall consider whether
 - (a) the economic situation in the Territory is such that the grant of a certificate to the applicant will prejudice the protection afforded under this Act to other persons engaging in the trade or profession in which the applicant is engaged or in which he is likely to engage;

- (b) the applicant has established a close personal connection with the Territory;
- (c) the applicant is committed to protecting the environment and sustainable practices dedicated to preserving the natural beauty and ecological balance of the Virgin Islands;
- (d) the applicant has undergone comprehensive background checks to ensure that the security and safety of the Territory is safeguarded;
- (e) the applicant has exhibited community participation and solidarity;
- (f) the applicant is committed to respect for cultural heritage and integration and has exhibited a willingness to engage in cultural and social orientation;
- (g) the applicant has demonstrated inclusivity and respect for diversity;
- (h) the applicant is supported by positive personal and professional references;
- (i) the applicant's character and previous conduct are unexceptional; and
- (j) the applicant's continued residence in, and association with, the Territory may afford some advantage to the Territory.

(6) A person who submits false or altered documents in support of an application for residence under section 18(1) or (2) commits an offence and is on summary conviction liable to pay a fine of \$10,000 and the person is prohibited from reapplying for a certificate of residence for a period of 5 years from the date on which the fine is paid.

(7) A certificate issued under this section shall be renewed every 5 years in accordance with regulations made under this Act.

(8) The Department of Immigration shall publish an annual report on decisions made by the Cabinet regarding the grant of residence status."

Section 19 amended

10. The principal Act is amended in section 19

- (a) by renumbering the provision as subsection (1)
- (b) in paragraph (a), by deleting the number "3" and substituting with the number "1";
- (c) by inserting immediately after paragraph (c) the following new paragraphs:

- “(d) has been found to organise or engage in subversive political activity or promotes discriminatory behaviour within the Territory or elsewhere;
- (e) provided false information in a material particular or concealed a material fact in the application for residence;
- (f) has become destitute through their own fault;
- (g) has failed to maintain the level of financial stability necessary to maintain himself or herself or his or her dependents;
- (h) is either no longer supporting, or able to support, a dependent previously endorsed in the certificate of residence;
- (i) is delinquent, for a period of more than 90 days, with respect to the payment of prescribed fees relating to the right to reside permanently in the Virgin Islands; or
- (j) is deemed to be an undesirable inhabitant of the Virgin Islands.”

Section 21 amended

11. The principal Act is amended in section 21(1) by inserting immediately after paragraph (i) the following new paragraph:

- “(j) children under the age of 11 years born in the Territory to parents who are ordinarily resident in the Territory and who do not hold a certificate issued under section 16 or 18 of this Act;”

Section 23 amended

12. The principal Act is amended in section 23 by inserting immediately after subsection (4), the following new subsections:

“(5) Where a person is not granted leave to land under subsection (1) by the immigration officer or the Chief Immigration Officer, after exercising his or her discretion under subsection (3), confirms the decision of the immigration officer under subsection (1), the person may appeal to the Immigration Appeals Board, within 21 days of the refusal to grant leave to land in such form as the Immigration Appeals Board shall determine.

(6) The person may appeal to the Immigration Appeals Board on the ground that

- (a) the immigration officer or Chief Immigration Officer misinterpreted or misapplied the provisions of the law;
- (b) or any other ground that the person considers reasonable.”

Section 24 amended

13. The principal Act is amended in section 24 by renumbering the provision as subsection (1) and inserting the following new subsection:

“(2) Where a person is not granted leave to land in the Territory by an immigration officer under section 23 and the Chief Immigration Officer, after

exercising his or her discretion under subsection (1) confirms the decision of the immigration officer, the person may appeal the decision of both the immigration officer and the Chief Immigration Officer to the Immigration Appeals Board within 21 days of the refusal to grant leave to land on the ground that the immigration officer or Chief Immigration Officer misinterpreted or misapplied the law, made a procedural error or other reasonable ground.”

Part VIIIA inserted

14. The principal Act is amended by inserting immediately after section 44 the following new Part:

“PART VIIIA

IMMIGRATION APPEALS BOARD

Establishment of the Immigration Appeals Board

44A. (1) There is established, for the purposes of this Act, a board to be known as the Immigration Appeals Board.

(2) The Immigration Appeals Board shall not be subject to the direction or control of any authority or body in the performance of its functions under this Act.

Composition and appointment

44B. The Immigration Appeals Board shall consist of 3 persons, all of whom shall be belongers appointed by the Minister with the approval of the Cabinet as follows:

- (a) a Chairperson who shall be a legal practitioner of not less than 10 years standing; and
- (b) 2 other persons of not less than 10 years’ experience in their respective fields of professional expertise, one of whom shall be nominated by the Premier and the other, by the Leader of the Opposition.

Disqualification for appointment

44C. A person shall be disqualified from appointment as a member of the Immigration Appeals Board where the member

- (a) is a member of the House of Assembly;
- (b) is not a believer or does not hold a certificate of believer status of 20 years or more;
- (c) is an undischarged bankrupt;
- (d) has been convicted of an offence other than a road traffic offence; and
- (e) has been certified by a medical practitioner to be of unsound mind.

Functions of Immigration Appeals Board

44D. (1) The Immigration Appeals Board shall be responsible for hearing appeals by any person aggrieved by a decision made against him or her under this Act.

(2) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1), the Immigration Appeals Board shall hear appeals relating to

- (a) misapplication of the provisions of the Act by the immigration officer or Chief Immigration Officer;
- (b) procedural errors made by the immigration officer or Chief Immigration Officer in the performance of their functions under the Act;
- (c) abuse of any discretionary powers by the Chief Immigration Officer or the Minister; and
- (d) decisions of the immigration officer or Chief Immigration Officer under the Act which in the opinion of the Immigration Appeals Board do not compromise national security.

(3) The Immigration Appeals Board shall not consider any appeal which in the opinion of the Immigration Appeals Board is frivolous and vexatious.

(4) The Immigration Appeals Board shall have power to regulate its own procedures.

Disclosure of interests

44E. (1) Where an appeal is to be decided by the Immigration Appeals Board at a hearing, any member present at the hearing who has an interest in the appeal shall, before the hearing, disclose the nature of the interest in advance of any consideration of the appeal.

(2) Where a member discloses an interest under this section

- (a) the disclosure shall be recorded in the record of the Immigration Appeals Board; and
- (b) the member shall not, unless the Immigration Appeals Board otherwise determines
 - (i) be present during any deliberations by the Immigration Appeals Board relating to the appeal; or
 - (ii) take part in any decision of the Immigration Appeals Board relating to the appeal.

Procedure for appeal

44F. (1) A person who is aggrieved by a decision of the Minister, immigration officer or Chief Immigration Officer under section 44D or any other decision made under this Act may, within 21 days from the date of the decision file a notice of appeal to the Immigration

Appeals Board in the form prescribed by rules made by the Immigration Appeals Board.

(2) A notice of appeal shall be filed in the form approved by the Immigration Appeals Board stating the grounds of appeal.

(3) Upon receipt of a notice of appeal, the Immigration Appeals Board shall proceed to hear the appeal in accordance with this Act and rules of appeal made under this Act.

(4) In hearing an appeal relating to a matter under section 44D or any other provisions of this Act, the Immigration Appeals Board shall reassess the decision and

- (a) have regard to the record of any oral, documentary or other evidence which the Minister or Chief Immigration Officer had relied upon in arriving at its decision;
- (b) have regard to the written decision of either the Minister or the Chief Immigration Officer and the reasons for the decision;
- (c) have regard to any documentary or other evidence provided by the appellant;
- (d) have regard to any submissions provided by the appellant, the Minister or the Chief Immigration Officer; and
- (e) allow the appellant, the Minister or the Chief Immigration Officer if any of them wish to do so, to be represented by a legal practitioner or other representative of their choice.

(5) In hearing an appeal referred to under subsection (1), the Immigration Appeals Board may

- (a) permit oral or written submissions, or both;
- (b) permit the introduction of evidence, oral or otherwise, if it is satisfied that new evidence has become available or has been discovered that
 - (i) is substantial and material to the decision of the Minister or the Chief Immigration Officer; and
 - (ii) did not exist at the time the Minister or the Chief Immigration Officer made its decision, or was not discovered or could not reasonably have been discovered at the time of the decision;
- (c) consider evidence related to the appeal, whether or not that evidence would be permissible in court; and

- (d) proceed with the hearing of the appeal in the absence of the appellant if the appellant has been given at least 7 days' notice of the hearing.

(6) On completion of hearing of an appeal against a decision made by the Minister, the immigration officer or the Chief Immigration Officer under this Act, and the reassessment of its decision on appeal, the Immigration Appeals Board shall proceed to make a decision.

Decision of Immigration Appeals Board

44G. (1) The Immigration Appeals Board may after hearing an appeal

- (a) confirm the decision of the immigration officer, the Chief Immigration Officer or the Minister;
- (b) vary the decision in such manner and to such extent as the Immigration Appeals Board considers proper; or
- (c) set aside the decision appealed against in accordance with such direction as the Immigration Appeals Board may specify.

(2) A decision of the Immigration Appeals Board shall

- (a) be in writing;
- (b) state the reasons for the decision; and
- (c) be binding on the parties to the appeal.

(3) The Immigration Appeals Board shall provide electronic copies of the decision to the parties to the appeal at no cost.

(4) The Immigration Appeals Board shall not award costs to any party in respect of an appeal heard by the Immigration Appeals Board.

Rules of evidence

44H. The Immigration Appeals Board is not bound by the rules of evidence in the hearing of any appeal, and it may inform itself of any matter that is before it in any way it reasonably believes to be appropriate and in accordance with the provisions of this Act and the rules of appeal made under this Act.

Appeal of decision of Immigration Appeals Board

44I. A person who is aggrieved by the decision of the Immigration Appeals Board may appeal to a court of competent jurisdiction.

Decisions of Immigration Appeals Board to be published

44J. The Immigration Appeals Board shall publish a summary of its decisions in the *Gazette*.

Annual report

44K. (1) The Immigration Appeals Board shall within 6 months of the end of each year prepare a report of its activities and work undertaken for that year.

(2) A report prepared under subsection (1) shall

- (a) be made available to the Minister by the Chairperson of the Immigration Appeals Board;
- (b) be submitted to Cabinet for information by the Minister within 3 months from the date the report is made available to the Minister and thereafter the report shall be laid in the House of Assembly within 3 months.

Rules of procedure

44L. (1) The Immigration Appeals Board may in addition to the rules of procedure made under section 45 make such other rules relative to its functions as it may consider proper for the purpose of facilitating the receipt of appeals under this Act.”

Section 45 amended

15. The principal Act is amended in section 45

- (a) by renumbering the provisions as subsection (1)
- (b) deleting the word “and” immediately after paragraph (m) and inserting the following new paragraphs:
 - “(ma) prescribing the criteria for review of applications for residence status;
 - (mb) prescribing the criteria for determining financial stability;
 - (mc) prescribing the rules by which appeals shall be made to Immigration Appeals Board including notices of appeal and the format for appeals;
 - (md) prescribing the costs associated with appeals made under the Act;
 - (me) prescribing the point-based system for obtaining belonger and residence status;
 - (mf) prescribing the annual cycle for consideration of applications for residence and belonger status;
 - (mg) prescribing the eligibility criteria and qualifications for categories of immigration quotas;
 - (mh) prescribing the guiding factors in consideration of applications for grant of belonger and residence status; and”;
- (c) by inserting the following new subsection:

“(2) Regulations made under this section shall be subject to a negative resolution of the House of Assembly.”

Section 49 amended

16. The principal Act is amended in section 49 by substituting for the fine of “\$1,000”, the fine of “\$5,000”.

Section 50A inserted

17. The principal Act is amended by inserting immediately after section 50 the following new provision:

“Transitional provisions

50A. This Act does not apply in relation to any application, made under section 16 or 18 of the principal Act, which was submitted to the Department prior to the commencement date of this Act and the former law continues to apply in relation to any such application.”

Passed by the House of Assembly this 28th day of May, 2024.

(Sgd.) Corine N. George-Massicote,
Speaker.

(Sgd.) Bethsaida Smith-Hanley,
Clerk of the House of Assembly.