

Senators, Close up staff, our teacher- chaperones, all student chairpersons of the various committees who worked on many issues in December. Good Morning.

I am Brenda King and I am a tenth grader at the Ivanna Eudora Kean High School on St.Thomas. Thank you for the opportunity to present to you the issues that we worked on during our December 7th to 9th Close Up summit, which was held here on St Thomas. I want to especially thank Senator Jackson for giving us this opportunity.

I am here to represent the committee on Government, Budget, & Crime. I was the chairperson for that committee but my fellow students worked diligently on three issues. The issues that we discussed and proposed were about gun violence, tax returns, and prison conditions. We choose these issues because over the last few years, these issues have affected the Virgin Islands tremendously and are now major problems that affect us all have been a major problem. Therefore, we wanted to appeal to the legislature to put laws in place that would give Virgin islanders some relief. We felt that the legislature should

#1: Reintroduce Bill NO.31-0028 so that we can outlaw criminal street gangs. By doing this, less crimes would occur. As well we felt that the legislative body should put measures in place to deal with the problem of street lighting the overgrown grass on the side of the roads. We felt that commuters would feel safer and are feel less fearful of those gangs operating in some shady areas especially in rural areas.

Our second issue was with the long wait that Virgin Islanders had before they received their tax refunds. I have heard that the long overdue 22 million in tax refunds for the past few years are being sent out. But we think the legislature should

#2: Create a task force that will keep track of every transaction to deal with the taxes of the Virgin islanders. We want the funds to be available so citizens will be aware of how their tax dollars is spent and also will be able to get their tax refund checks on time. While the people on the mainland are able to get refunds in about a month, our parents are waiting at least a year for refunds that have been processed but are not paid.

Our final proposal was to deal with the training of correction officers. We want the officers to be trained in various ways.

#3: Training for correctional officers should include physical training, good negotiating and communicating skills so they can quell hostile inmate. As well officers need, anger management training to prevent inappropriate behavior between officers and inmates. They needed to be well trained to deal with emergencies and they should have be all know the right search procedures. Improvement of knowledge of search procedures is important to prevent prisoners' possession of contraband as we have heard of many incidents of cellphones and drugs entering the prisons. In our committee we looked at the shortage of the prison staff

According to our research on St.Croix there is need of 80 correctional officers and there are only 36 working at present .This body needs to do something

My committee members were from different schools and different islands, but, we all felt that these issues were important enough to propose that something be done about the gang activities, the lack of enough trained correction professionals. As well we want an improvement in the processing of tax refunds to give Virgin Islanders some relief.

It is my hope that you, as our elected senators, will hear our concerns and act on them to give all Virgin islanders a place to call home. Thank You so much