



OPI'A TAINO INTERNATIONAL INC.

March 8, 2016

To: Hon. Senator Myron D. Jackson,

St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands

Re: March 8<sup>th</sup> hearing of the Committee on Culture, Historic Preservation, Youth & Recreation on the subject of recognizing Amerindian heritage in the Virgin Islands.

Tahaki (Greetings) Honorable Senator Myron D. Jackson:

As the President of Opi'a Taino and Opi'a Taino International it is once again with a humbling spirit that I stand before you on this historic day to give testimony on the importance of this Act providing for the recognition of and respect for our sacred national patrimony and the rights of the Taino, Carib (Kalinago) and other Caribbean indigenous Peoples, as pre-Columbian inhabitants of the Virgin Islands.

As a descendant of the indigenous peoples of these Virgin Islands I have attached my mtDNA results for your review so you can understand the importance of this Act that is proposed here today. I cannot express the importance of taking this first step to secure our place in history for ourselves, our children, our community but most of all the survival of our future generations.

I would like to say it is equally important for people with indigenous ancestral heritage to register with the International Tribal Registry that is sanctioned by The United Confederation of Taino People in Unison with its Affiliate member Opi'a Taino of St. Thomas so that in the year 2020 we would be formally included in the United States Federal Census as Indian and not Mullato or people of color. This is the first step towards looking for recognition by the Federal Government.

It is important for us to establish a Local Tribal Council that will be the overseers of Tribal Business and be the Liaison between the Government and the Tribe.



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By joining the United Nations in recognizing August 9th as “International Day of the World's Indigenous People”, we have gathered in unison to offer up our prayers as a united nation, this pays tribute and respect to God, the Creator and our Ancestors.

We are also humbled that the month of November, is indeed “Virgin Islands Indigenous Native American Heritage Month” as Proclaimed by former Governor deJongh. This gives us the opportunity to share indigenous culture, history, and traditions, with all students during the school year while taking the focus off of Columbus.

In closing I commend the hard work and dedication of this 31<sup>st</sup> Legislature that has brought this Act to the floor today and I pray that the Creator will guide your steps through the completion of this sacred task.

Oma bahari (With respect)  
*Maekiaphan Phillips*  
Maekiaphan Phillips