



GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS

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**DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

45 Mars Hill, Frederiksted  
St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands 00840-4474

Office of the Commissioner

Telephone: (340) 773-1082

Fax: (340) 773-1716

**TESTIMONY**

**Dawn L. Henry, Esq., Commissioner**  
Department of Planning and Natural Resources

Committee on Culture, Historic Preservation,  
Youth and Recreation

**Senator Myron D. Jackson**  
**Chair**

To receive an update on plans for an official Virgin Islands delegation in Cuba for the Fiesta del Caribe in July 2016.

Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall  
St. Thomas

May 23, 2016

**TESTIMONY**

**Committee on Culture, Historic Preservation, Youth and Recreation**

**Senator Myron D. Jackson, Chair**

*Re: To receive an update on plans for an official Virgin Islands delegation in Cuba for the Fiesta del Caribe in July 2016*

**May 23, 2016**

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Good Afternoon Senator Myron D. Jackson, Chairman of the Committee on Culture, Historic Preservation, Youth and Recreation, other members of the committee and other senators present, and to the listening and viewing audience.

I am Dawn Henry, Commissioner for the Department of Planning and Natural Resources. Thank you for your letter of invitation dated May 18, 2016, requesting the participation of the DPNR and Acting Director Tasida Kelch of the Virgin Islands Council of the Arts (VICA) in your committee meeting to receive an update on plans for an official Virgin Islands delegation in Cuba for the Fiesta del Caribe in July 2016. The letter of invitation from the Casa Del Caribe, invites the Virgin Islands to participate in the 36<sup>th</sup> Festival del Caribe, which is going to take place from July 3<sup>rd</sup> through July 9<sup>th</sup> and is dedicated to the culture of the people of Ecuador.

In reviewing the attached documentation accompanying the request to participate in this hearing, it is clear that this cultural exchange trip to Cuba has already undergone extensive planning. A tentative agenda is set, along with an itemized budget to cover travel costs. It is also evident, Mr. Chairman, that it is your intention to reprogram, in part, FY 2016 monies assigned to the Virgin Islands Cultural Heritage Institute to VICA to assist with funding this trip.

DPNR would like to offer a few observations and suggestions regarding its role in the planning of the trip. First it is our understanding that VICA will be responsible for processing travel related costs to total the amount reprogrammed. To accomplish this goal, VICA will need all necessary documentation to support its request to the Department of Finance, to include but not limited to, invoices for airline travel, hotel accommodations, and ground transportation. If, meals are to be covered, a process will need to be put in place for individuals or individual groups to receive their checks in advance. Individuals and groups will need to be in the Department of Finance's systems before checks can be issued. Secondly, for any monies that were advanced, all participants will need to be clear on the documentation they would be responsible to provide to VICA upon their return. Finally, VICA and DPNR are requesting the continued coordination of this event between your office and VICA.

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This coordination is essential to avoid duplicative efforts as well as conflicting decisions.

These are exciting times for the people of Cuba. According to the Festival del Caribe's website "over 200 thousand artist and intellectuals from approximately 18 countries participate in the festival. Since its founding in April 1981, the carnival has honored the most authentic and spiritual roots of all Caribbean countries. As a rule each year the Caribbean Festival has paid tribute to a country or group of countries to include Haiti, Guyana, Brazil, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Mexico, Honduras, Africa, the Francophone and Anglophone Caribbean, Columbia, Panama, Netherlands Antilles, Aruba and Suriname." This opportunity will provide participating Virgin Islanders with the chance to experience how varying nations creatively express culture, life and the arts. It is both DPNR's and VICA's hope that in the end, this trip positively impacts the way we view our own culture and the arts.

Once again Senator, thank you for the invitation and I am here to participate in the discussion.