



THE VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

WRITTEN TESTIMONY BY
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AND RECREATION
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The student exchange experience encompasses all aspects of student life (i.e. academic, social, welfare and support) with the academic imperative at the heart of it.

Greetings Honorable Chair, Myron Jackson, members of the Committee on Culture, Historic Preservation, Youth and Recreation, and other members of the 31th Legislature. I, Valrica Bryson, State Director of Culture Education, will present the Department of Education's testimony in response to the Senator Jackson's query regarding the United States Virgin Islands Delegation to Cuba. The Department of Education is currently reaching out to the Cuban Ministry of Education to establish a student exchange program utilizing sports and music as the two entities of common interest and share the universal language. The adult representatives will begin meeting in September 2016 with the student exchanges beginning in November or December.

We, in the Department of Education, believe that student exchanges are important to explore curiosity and respect for other cultures. The prospective student exchange program between the Virgin Islands of the United States of America and Cuba is a way of building a bridge of understanding that will lead to so much more.

Every school in Cuba participates in the Junior Olympics Program established in 1963. As of 1978 the Cuban Junior Olympics involved several sports: Chess, Weightlifting, Tennis, Football, Table Tennis, Basketball, Gymnastics, Swimming, Diving, Volleyball, Water Polo, Cycling, Fencing, Judo, Baseball and Wrestling. With baseball and basketball

as more popular sports in Cuba, as well as in the Virgin Islands, students in the program will immediately share a mutual bond and common language

Additionally, like the country of Cuba has a myriad of musical genres, the Virgin Islands also has several forms of folk music. However, there is one genre that musicians from both the Virgin Islands and Cuba share and embrace, the musical genre of Jazz. Through this unique and universal music form, the members of the Virgin Islands Jazz Ensemble, comprised of high school students from several schools in the Territory, will ensure a great synergy among the students of the Virgin Islands and the students of Cuba.

In addition, we will be launching, in conjunction with the University of the Virgin Islands, The Youth Writers Collection – an ongoing project involving literary works from students within the Virgin Islands school system and school systems throughout the Caribbean.

Cultural Education will be infused in our Language Arts classrooms, which will make our students feel that they are valued. The realization that Cultural Education is an essential component for our pupils has been supported by all.

I would like to end our testimony with a quote from Philmon Haile, an Eritrean refugee who won the University of Washington 2014 Rangel Fellow who participated in an exchange program in China, *“Study abroad is a powerful vehicle for people-to-people exchange as we move into a new era of citizen diplomacy.”*

This ends our testimony, and we await any questions you may have on this topic.