

**Gerard M. Emanuel**  
P.O. Box 5660  
Christiansted, USVI 00823-5660  
(340) 226-9528 (cell)  
[maat842@gmail.com](mailto:maat842@gmail.com) (email)

The Honorable Myron D. Jackson  
Legislative Secretary  
Thirty-first Legislature of the Virgin Islands

Dear Honorable Senator Jackson:

Please accept my sincere thanks for inviting me to testify on BILL NO. 31-0346. It proposes to make July 1<sup>st</sup> to July 7<sup>th</sup> a Freedom Week “throughout the Virgin Islands”. I cannot attend the hearing since I will be away for my daughter’s graduation.

Honorable senators, I agree with the concept of a “Freedom Week “, but only if it is a Freedom Week “of the Virgin Islands”, and not merely in or throughout the Virgin Islands as the Bill states. This distinction is critically important because “of the Virgin Islands” implies that whatever is celebrated should be based on our own struggles for freedom, or others that are similarly based. “In or throughout the Virgin Islands” imply that anything can be celebrated, whether it supports or opposes our freedom struggles. Please change “**throughout the Virgin Islands**” to “**of the Virgin Islands**”.

Honorable Senators, I respectfully disagree with the dates selected, the scope of SECTION 197a, as well as some of the wording and placement of the WHEREAS clauses. Also, more historically relevant language should be inserted at the beginning of the Bill.

First, wherever the word “slave” or “slaves” appear, they should be replaced with enslaved or enslaved African or Africans. Contemporary scholars do this to emphasize that slavery was their involuntary condition and it did not change their identity.

Second, remove the first four WHEREAS clauses, from the beginning of the bill. Their placement there, gives them a false degree of importance, and also creates the mistaken

impression that Governor Peter Von Scholten was the good guy, who was for the enslaved, and that King Christian was the bad guy who delayed emancipation. These clauses should be placed further down in the bill, to indicate that they were factors, but not the prime factors that caused our ancestors to organize and demand their emancipation on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1848.

The WHEREAS clauses should begin by showing that our ancestors were living as free and self-determined citizens in their own democratically ruled nations, before Europeans came to Africa. They should also include that our ancestors knew from their oral and written documentation, the accomplishments of African people throughout the continent of Africa and elsewhere in the fields of navigation, science, astronomy, math, medicine, literature, masonry, philosophy, etc. The WHEREAS clauses should also indicate that our ancestors fought for their freedom from the time they were captured, and never stopped planning, organizing, and fighting - whether overtly or covertly. Earlier revolutions in the VI verify this. Finally the WHEREAS clauses must mention that our ancestors were treated as prisoners of war in prison camps, mistakenly called plantations, where, some of the worst atrocities known to man or woman occurred, while the treasuries of Denmark, England, France, Holland and Spain benefitted from their free labor. These are some of the most important reasons for the emancipation of July 3, 1848. However, the bill does not include any of this important contextual information, and makes it appear that our African ancestors rose up only because a Danish king said that they had to wait 12 more years to be freed.

My other concern is that this bill also includes July the 4<sup>th</sup> in “Freedom week”. This date is after our emancipation day. More importantly, the event it celebrates is the opposite of our ancestors’ struggles as Virgin Islanders. Since July the 4<sup>th</sup> celebrates the freedom and the empowerment of wealthy European males to be slaveholders, including it is similar to Jews including a day to celebrate the birth of the Nazi party during a holocaust remembrance week.

In conclusion, I suggest the following:

1<sup>st</sup> Remove the words slave and slaves, and replace the first four WHEREAS clauses with historically accurate information about our ancestors' conditions prior to slavery as well as examples of the suffering they endured, to emphasize that these were some of the principal and persistent causes for emancipation. You can then insert the original WHEREAS clauses that now appear first in the bill after this new language. This would put them in their proper context, and make it clear that they were only the final straw that broke the camel's back, and not the main cause for emancipation.

2<sup>nd</sup> On page 2 of the bill, please re-verify the figure of thirty thousand enslaved persons.

3<sup>rd</sup> and finally, Amend SECTION §197a to read as follows:

“§197a The dates of June 26<sup>th</sup> through July 3<sup>rd</sup> of each year shall be observed as ‘Freedom week’ of the Virgin Islands, to commemorate the emancipation of the enslaved persons in the Danish West Indies, now the Virgin Islands of the United States, and any other freedom struggles that are ideologically consistent therewith.”

Thank you.

Respectfully,

Gerard M. Emanuel