

Bill No. 31-0449
Monday, September 19, 2016

Good evening Honorable Myron D. Jackson, Chairman, Committee on Culture, Historic Preservation, Youth and Recreation, Committee Members, Senators, Ladies and Gentlemen in the Chambers and the listening and viewing audience. I am Beverly Nicholson Doty, Commissioner of the Department of Tourism.

I applaud Senator Jackson's initiative to commemorate the 250th Anniversary of the establishment of the Town of Cruz Bay. The Department of Tourism recognizes the role the formation of this town played in our history particularly to Free People of Color. Cruz Bay past and present is a hub of social and economic activity.

The Department of Tourism certainly supports the integration of historic events and authentic experiences into the overall visitor offerings. We also see this integration as a key component of building pride in who we are as a people which promotes the sharing of what is uniquely Virgin Islands.

The legislation, we believe, is put forth in a spirit of commemoration and preservation. Nonetheless, there are concerns in executing this mandate if passed.

Section 3 directs the Office of the Governor, the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, and the Department of Tourism to plan a ceremony to celebrate the anniversary. It further states these agencies shall engage ANY local, civic, organization or person interested in participating and planning.

Section 4- Funding that is sufficient to plan and carryout the activities as described in section two.

Section- 5- Outlines several agencies and the Office of the Governor to engage in cultural heritage activities.

1. We have many historic milestones in our territory. Is there an established vetting process which designates which are observed and which are celebrated?
2. "Funding as sufficient" is ambiguous in the absence of clearly defined goals, objectives, measurement and evaluation to determine ROI.
3. The bill as written mandates the event(s) to occur within one year of the passage of the legislation. As we are all aware 2017 is the commemoration of our Transfer so we would be promoting another event. The most effective marketing strategy must be focused with clear and concise targeted messaging or you risk diminishing the effectiveness of the strategy
4. We must be honest. The distribution of both financial and human resources is a great concern. The DOT has one of the smallest staff's, with less than thirty employees and we are consistently asked to organize, coordinate and implement projects, programs and events which stretch our capacity. While expanding our capabilities is good, we cannot

do so at the risk of not delivering on our core mandate. The Department of Tourism does not have culture and historic preservation under its direct scope of responsibility, although we believe it is integral of the industry. It is impossible to effectively to lead many mandates and to do so well without funding and human capacity. A perfect example is the Cuba initiative. While we embraced the philosophy on the value of cultural exchange I cautioned about the ability execute without funding and ample time for effective execution. As you are aware the Department of Tourism, in a show of support, engaged in this effort and as a result was the primary contributor, both to the expense and facilitation of the culture bears attending this event. The DOT committed a staff member to travel with the group of entertainers which the Department sponsored. Our team member was totally stretched using personal resources to cover expenses beyond what was originally outlined, as we took our responsibility of having these young people in a foreign country seriously

Senators, I bring these matters to light not because the Department does not wish to be engaged and be a partner in acknowledging the 250th anniversary of the founding of Cruz Bay, but to highlight the real issue of prioritizing based on resources.

Again, culture and history are a key element of our marketing strategy. However, equally important is securing airlift to St. Croix, partnering with channels for business distribution such as Airbnb and VRBO to ensure we are collecting room tax and all other applicable taxes so that we can grow are economy.

I caution us to appreciate that a diverse tourism product has many aspects, culture and history certainly being a pillar. We must create a balance to ensure we have resources to effectively market, promote and implement other key areas which are equally important.

Thank you for the opportunity to place testimony on the record. I remain available to take your questions.