VIRGIN ISLANDS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
Testimony before the
COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AGRICULTURE AND PLANNING
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Pleasant Good Morning. I am Nadine Marchena Kean, Director of the Virgin Islands Economic Development Authority's Enterprise & Commercial Zone Commission. I would like thank Chairperson Janette Millin Young and the honorable members of the Committee on Economic Development, Agriculture and Planning for inviting me to testify on Bill No. 31-0055 an act providing for a feasibility study for establishing a plant for processing local fruits and other agricultural products.

A food processing plant in the Virgin Islands has been an idea that has been on the table for a very long time. The VIEDA through its incubator program has fielded numerous food companies that require a clean kitchen to move forward in production. The demand for this facility is so strong that the Authority is in the process of applying for a grant that will fund this facility as an extension of the incubator program.

In 2013, the VIEDA through its community development division in collaboration with the VI Department of Agriculture and the Office of the Governor applied for the "100 Resilient Cities" grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. Over 1000 cities registered their interest in applying for the grant. The Virgin Islands was among the 400 cities that actually filed an application. This illustrates the importance of food resilience and security on the national and international community. Our application was specific to food resilience and included as a component, a processing plant. The goal was to move towards self sufficiency and that in a disaster, nationally or international, we would have the ability to feed ourselves. Unfortunately the Territory was not amongst the 33 cities that were selected to receive the grant. VIEDA continues to be committed to assisting food and agribusinesses through its lending, incubator and community development programs.

Another instance of demonstrated need for a processing plant became apparent with the VIEDA export promotion program sponsored by the SBA. The goal was to assist businesses that manufactured products locally to increase their export capability. This included training, providing funds for marketing material translations and financing marketing trips to the largest industry tradeshows like SIAL in Brazil and Summer Fancy Food in New York. The companies from the VI were well received and their products admired. Some of the companies are in need of mass production and distribution. There is a potential for a food processing plant to provide expanded services to some of these companies that need manufacturing at a larger quantity than the entrepreneur can provide for them self. Additionally, there is a potential to increase trade regionally in order to take advantage of the made in the USA status.