



VIRGIN ISLANDS PORT AUTHORITY

Post Office Box 301707

ST. THOMAS, VIRGIN ISLANDS U.S.A. 00803-1707

TEL: (340) 774-1629 • FAX (340) 774-0025

WWW.VIPORT.COM

August 17, 2016

The Honorable Senator Justin Harrigan, Sr.
Chairman, Committee on Government Services, Consumer & Veterans Affairs
31st Legislature of the US Virgin Islands
Capitol Building
PO Box 1690
St. Thomas, VI 00804

Re: Barge Services between St. Thomas and St. John, US Virgin Islands

Dear Senator Harrigan:

I am writing in response to your letter dated August 8, 2016. Thank you for the invitation to testify before the Committee on Government Services, Consumer and Veterans Affairs regarding barge services between St. Thomas and St. John. As we are all aware, the island of St. John is only accessible by boat. Ferry and barge transportation are the lifeline for residents of St. John that commute for work or medical services provided only on St. Thomas. The barges are also used to transport vehicles, service and delivery trucks loaded with construction equipment, food, mail, cargo, and garbage disposal equipment to and from St. John. Our tourists also use the barges to travel from St. Thomas to explore the array of popular visitor attractions on St. John.

Our community has recently been seriously impacted due to the lack of scheduled and sufficient barge transportation between St. Thomas and St. John. Today there are only three barges providing service between Red Hook, St. Thomas and Enighed Pond, St. John. At times there was only one barge available to service this route. Travelers have had to endure extremely long wait times to board the few barges available over the last four to six weeks. Many have opted to forego barge transportation and utilize the ferry services instead, which has now caused longer wait time for the ferry services as well. The longer lines have impacted roadway traffic, and frustrated travelers have caused disruptions at our Ports that had to be curtailed by our security officers and Port Police.

The Virgin Islands Port Authority's primary responsibility is to provide safe and modern port facilities. VIPA does not own any barges, nor do we provide public transportation from any of our ports. However, the Port Authority's board is concerned about the lack of sufficient barge service and the impact it has caused on our community, our tourism product and our port operations. In an effort to resolve this problem, my staff and I have met several times with the existing barge service providers to ascertain the causes of the myriad of issues that led to the reduction in available barges. VIPA's board has also heard presentations on these same issues from the barge companies.

In addition, we have done our best to respond to the public outcry by appearing on local radio talk shows to explain the reasons for the lack of service. We have also responded to several written and telephone complaints and distributed press releases to our local media. We hope to have some resolution to this issue in the very near future, and we will keep the public abreast of any new developments.

This concludes my testimony. My staff and I are available to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Carlton Dowe

Executive Director, Virgin Islands Port Authority