

TESTIMONY SUPPORTING A LEASE AGREEMENT
COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
36TH LEGISLATURE OF THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS

April 21, 2026

EARL B. OTTLEY LEGISLATIVE HALL (VIRTUALLY)
CAPITAL BUILDING, ST.THOMAS US VIRGIN ISLANDS 00802

BY:

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HEARTS IN SERVICE ASSOCIATION, INC.

Good morning, Committee Chairman Honorable Novelle Francis, distinguished members of the 36th Legislature, staff, and the listening and viewing public. Thank you for the opportunity to come before you today.

My name is Beverly Stephens-Samuel, and I am the Executive Director for Hearts In Service Association Inc (HISA). I have been with HISA since February 15, 2026. HISA was founded in 2004 and is a Nonprofit 501(c)3 faith-based organization, which is made up of diverse individuals, drawn together as a ministry for service. We are answering to God's call to restore lives by reaching and uplifting individuals who are experiencing homelessness, the most vulnerable, and poverty stricken because of economic barriers, such as affordable housing, and unemployment, mental and traumatic issues.

Today I am appearing before the Finance Committee seeking approval of the revised lease agreement between the Government of the United States Virgin Islands and Hearts In Service Association Inc, for the former Senior Citizen Center, located at 175C Estate Annas Retreat, St. Thomas Virgin Islands; and ultimately, the final approval of the full Senate Body. I come before you not just with a request, but with a vision. A vision rooted in compassion, practicality, and long-term community impact. This vision is to transform an underutilized space into a One Stop Centralized Outreach Center that will serve some of the most vulnerable members of our community: the homeless, and low-to-moderate income individuals and families. This center is not just about providing shelter. It is about restoring dignity. It is about creating access to services, to opportunity, and to stability. It is about offering a pathway forward for those who, through circumstance, have found themselves without one. However, before this vision can become reality, there are real and immediate barriers that must be addressed. One of the most pressing is the current lease rate of \$1,000 per month. At this early stage before funding has been fully secured and before renovations can even begin this cost presents a significant challenge.

We respectfully request that the lease be at a rate of \$100 per month. This adjustment is a strategic investment that allows us the time and capacity to secure funding, complete necessary renovations, and build a sustainable program that will ultimately serve the people of this territory. By granting this request, you are simply not lowering a lease. You are helping to lay the foundation for a resource hub that can reduce homelessness, support working families, and strengthen our community as a whole.

Despite the many efforts made over the years to eradicate extreme homelessness, hundreds of families are still sleeping in places not meant for human habitation and are waiting to access crucial emergency housing.

As previously testified back on December 13, 2021, the purpose for leasing the property is to create a "One Stop Centralized Outreach Center, which will allow Hearts In Service Association (HISA) to have the appropriate and centralize space to operate their daily tasks more productively, collecting and maintaining system level data and information, organize planning and reporting. Undertaking such a dignified approach, it will enable the association to perform and provide services more effectively, while working vigorously to complete the ongoing construction of a permanent "One Stop Transitional Facility" project which is located at 173B-88 Annas Retreat.

Just to update you, on March 12, 2025, HISA had its open house and dedication ceremony to show to invited guests and the general public the three units completed so far and naming the One Stop Transitional Facility the JMCD Henryville Residence after Joseph Mc Donald Henry who is seated here with me today. We thank Senate President Milton Potter, Senator Ray Fonseca, Senator Avery Lewis, Senator Carla J. Joseph and Mr. Krigger who represented Senator Marvin Blyden's office for attending. We also thank Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach for attending this ceremony. It truly made a difference. We look forward to seeing each one of you here today, in whatever capacity, to our next ribbon cutting ceremony.

In addition, the building is perfectly suited for the intended purpose to carry out the training aspect of the program, which is for providing life changing empowerment skills; and since life skills are not normally taught in a classroom setting, HISA will structure its learning through a combination of formal and informal training workshops, incorporated through real life situations and weekly group activities. The main objective is to build the life skills of the homeless, by preparing them to lead productive, self-sufficient and healthy lives, and most importantly to support them in their transition to independent and stable living. Few of the programs we intend to offer are but are not limited to:

Financial literacy - Health and Wellness Home Economics - Employment Stability

Entrepreneurship - Housing Access - Interpersonal Skills - Recreation and Cultural literacy

In addition, case management and support services to at-risk under-served youth between the ages of 16-24 who are exiting out of foster care system, parenting teens, homeless single mothers and other supportive services to at-risk families.

Having the centralized outreach center at this particular location guarantees transportation accessibility to the disenfranchised. Further, it would also enable us to establish a soup kitchen with larger space to serve a nutritious meal with love every day to anyone that's hungry. A real meal is more than providing hot food for the marginalized population, we aim to create friendships, build trust and give the most important thing one can give, our time. "Time Caring" as we call it, is something that we all so easily take for granted in our busy day to day lives, filled with appointments and friends, but for our friends on the street, the time of day can be the most valuable thing to share with another and equally the one thing that is missed the most.

We understand the responsibility you carry as stewards of public resources. And we stand ready to be accountable and committed to delivering measurable impact. It is our hope that you will consider our proposal and allow us the opportunity to serve the homeless and low-moderate population, as the association works in collaboration to end extreme homelessness in the Virgin Islands.

Today, we ask for your partnership. We ask for your support in making this vision possible not just for us, but for the many individuals and families who will benefit from it. Today, we thank you for your support each year with the local funding through the Department of Human Services. We thank you for your time, your consideration, and your continued service to the people of the Virgin Islands.