

TESTIMONY OF EIGHT ONE SUBBASE, LLC

IN SUPPORT OF THE LEASE AGREEMENT FOR THE REGGAE FOOD YARD

Thursday, August 20, 2026

Honorable Members of the Legislature of the Virgin Islands:

Good day, Chair Francis, and Members of the 37th Legislature, legislative staff, and everyone in attendance. I appear today to testify on behalf of Eight One Subbase, LLC and to ask for your support of this lease agreement.

Allow me to introduce myself and provide some background on who I am and the experiences that have shaped me.

I am a proud son of the Virgin Islands. I was born on St. Thomas and raised in this community. I am the son of Dr. Rita J. Howard and the late Roy A. Howard who dedicated much of their lives to educating and serving the people of the Virgin Islands.

My mother spent 44 years as an educator in the VI education system at both the school and university levels, until she retired as a UVI Professor with an impeccable legacy of service. My late father, Roy A. Howard, was a physical education teacher. Growing up in a household with two educators taught me early that service to your community is not simply something you **talk about**, **it is something you demonstrate through your actions**. Their service to the Virgin Islands community has left a tremendous influence on my own life.

I began my education at Joseph Gomez Elementary School and graduated from Charlotte Amalie High School (CAHS). At CAHS, I was active in football and basketball and was also a member of both the concert and marching bands throughout my four years. Those experiences taught me discipline, teamwork, leadership, and the importance of being part of something larger than yourself.

I later attended the University of the Virgin Islands, earning an Associate of Arts degree in Business Management and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Business Administration with a concentration in Marketing. While at UVI, I continued my involvement in both athletics and music as a member of the UVI Men's Basketball Team and the University's Jazz and Concert Bands.

One of the great privileges of my athletic career came in 2001, when I had the opportunity to represent the Virgin Islands as a member of the Men's National Basketball Team at the University Games in Beijing, China. Representing the Virgin Islands internationally remains an experience that I carry with great pride.

I have had a diverse work experience which took me into finance and accounting. I joined Sea View Nursing Home as an Accounts Payable Coordinator, under the tutelage of Julio Rhymer,

working for a Virgin Islands giant, Dr. Alfred O Heath. I later joined Trust Asset Management and worked for Hedge Fund Manager, Donald Sussman, under the tutelage of Bosede Bruce.

In 2009, I joined U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) as a CBP officer. I later transitioned to the United States Department of Justice and the United States Marshals Service, where I continue my federal law enforcement career today.

But beyond my education, athletics, professional accomplishments, and career in public service, the roles that mean the most to me are those of husband to my wife and father to two daughters.

I share this condensed background with you not simply to tell you where I have worked or what I have accomplished. I share it because **the Virgin Islands is not simply where I live—it is the community that raised me, educated me, gave me opportunities, and helped shape the person I am today.** I was raised by people who believed deeply in education, discipline, accountability, and service. I attended our schools, played on our courts and fields, performed in our bands, graduated from our University, worked in our private sector, and have spent much of my professional career in public service. Those experiences shape the perspective I bring before this body today.

I recognize that in considering a long-term lease of government property, the question before this body is larger than whether a particular business should be permitted to occupy a particular parcel of land. The more important question is whether the proposed use of that public property will produce meaningful value for the people of the Virgin Islands.

I believe the Reggae Food Yard will.

This project is an opportunity to put government property to productive use while creating a new platform for local entrepreneurship, small-business development, employment, cultural expression, community activity, and economic growth. The vision for the Reggae Food Yard grew organically from what began as a hobby and developed into a passion for food, hospitality, and creating spaces where people can come together.

As that passion developed into a business concept, I began speaking with other culinary enthusiasts and aspiring food entrepreneurs. Again and again, I heard the same challenge: they had the talent, the recipes, the ideas, and the desire to build a business, but they did not necessarily have the capital needed to open a traditional restaurant.

Opening a brick-and-mortar restaurant requires significant upfront investment commercial space, kitchen infrastructure, utilities, equipment, furnishings, insurance, staffing, and numerous other operating expenses. For many aspiring entrepreneurs, those costs can prevent a good idea from ever getting started. The vision is to create a more accessible pathway into the culinary industry by providing food vendors and entrepreneurs with an established location where they can introduce their concepts, build a customer base, refine their businesses, and generate the revenue and experience necessary to grow.

For some vendors, the Reggae Food Yard may become their permanent business home. For others, we hope it becomes a launching pad toward a food truck fleet, catering operation, traditional restaurant, or another successful Virgin Islands business. That is how small businesses are built, by giving people an attainable place to begin.

The Reggae Food Yard is therefore about much more than food. It is about economic opportunity. The development is envisioned as a dedicated mobile food-vendor courtyard in Subbase, St. Thomas, with designated parking, shaded seating, entertainment space, restrooms, storage, and utility infrastructure necessary to support participating businesses. Instead of individual entrepreneurs having to independently acquire all of that infrastructure, the Food Yard creates a shared environment in which multiple small businesses can operate and benefit. That creates a chance not only for food vendors, but for the broader local economy.

The project has the potential to support jobs and business activity involving food preparation, hospitality, maintenance, entertainment, security, landscaping, cleaning, transportation, local agriculture, fishermen, wholesalers, suppliers, tradespeople, and other service providers. As participating businesses grow, that economic impact can grow with them. My goal is to create an environment in which Virgin Islands dollars circulate through Virgin Islands businesses and Virgin Islands families.

I also envision the Food Yard as something increasingly important to the Territory: a much-needed place where people can gather. I am offering a clean, safe, welcoming, family-friendly environment where residents can meet after work, families can spend time together, visitors can experience local food and culture, and local musicians and entertainers can have another venue to showcase their talents.

Food has always been one of the ways communities connect. In the Virgin Islands, our food also tells our story. Our culinary traditions reflect generations of Caribbean history, culture, family, migration, agriculture, and creativity.

The Food Court will provide a chance to showcase that culture while also allowing new culinary concepts to emerge. This allows us to create a destination that residents can embrace as their own and that visitors can discover as part of an authentic Virgin Islands experience. The project also represents an opportunity to contribute to the continued commercial development and revitalization of the Subbase area.

The parcels covered by the proposed lease comprise approximately 28,591 square feet of improved property, or approximately 0.6564 acres.

Through private investment, Eight One Subbase, LLC intends to transform this property into an active, attractive, and productive commercial and community space. The Government is not simply leasing property. It is enabling private investment in public property that can generate broader public benefit.

The value of this lease should therefore be measured not solely by the annual rental payment, but also by the economic activity generated on the property: improvements made to the site, businesses supported, people employed, vendors and suppliers utilized, taxes generated, visitors attracted, and opportunities created for Virgin Islanders.

The proposed lease provides for a 20-year term, with an option to renew for three additional 10-year terms, at an annual rent of \$12,000, payable in monthly installments of \$1,000.

I fully recognize that these parcels belong to the people of the Virgin Islands. With the opportunity to occupy public property comes an obligation to be a responsible steward of that property and to ensure that its use contributes positively to the surrounding community and the Territory.

I accept that responsibility.

The long-term nature of the lease is also important because meaningful development requires meaningful investment. The stability provided by a long-term lease gives the lessee the ability and incentive to invest in infrastructure, improvements, amenities, maintenance, and the overall quality of the property rather than approaching it as a short-term commercial venture.

I am building something that lasts. This project was not conceived simply as a commercial real estate opportunity. It grew from listening to people with talent and ambition who needed somewhere attainable to begin.

The Reggae Food Yard is my effort to turn that need into opportunity. With the Legislature's approval, these parcels can become a place where a Virgin Islander with a great recipe but limited capital can test an idea; where a food vendor can grow into an employer; where a local musician can perform; where families can gather; where visitors can experience our culture; and where public property can generate continuing economic and community value. That is the return I believe the people of the Virgin Islands can receive from this lease.

Members of the Legislature, I am not asking you simply to approve a lease. I am asking you to approve a chance to activate public property, encourage private investment, and lower the barriers to entrepreneurship.

Eight One Subbase, LLC is prepared to make the phased-investment and undertake the responsibility necessary to turn the vision and opportunity into reality.

I therefore respectfully ask the Honorable Members of the Legislature of the Virgin Islands to support and approve the proposed lease agreement between the Government of the Virgin Islands and Eight One Subbase, LLC. Your approval will allow us to move forward with transforming this property into a functioning culinary destination and, more importantly, into a platform through which Virgin Islanders can pursue their ideas, build businesses, create jobs, and contribute to the economic vitality of our Territory.

I respectfully request your favorable consideration and approval of the lease agreement that will allow Eight One Subbase, LLC to develop Parcel No. 81A-Revised and Parcel No. 81B-Revised in Subbase, St. Thomas. I appreciate the Legislature's consideration of this request. Thank you for your time and support.