

Good afternoon, Senator Novelle E. Francis, Jr., Chairman of the Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance; distinguished members of the Committee and other legislative members present; fellow testifiers; and the listening and viewing audience.

My name is Doyle Jones, President of the St. Thomas Cricket Association (STCA) and I am pleased to provide testimony in support of Bill No. 36-0293, an act approving the lease agreement between the Government of the Virgin Islands and the St. Thomas Cricket Association, Inc. for Parcel No. 2 of Tract 1, Estate Nazareth.

Following the devastating storms of 2017, cricket was left without a permanent home in the St. Thomas-St. John district. After many discussions, this Administration identified this parcel and provided the cricket community with an opportunity to rebuild the sport and establish a permanent home in the district. The cricket community is deeply grateful for this opportunity and for the Administration's continued support. This site presents an extraordinary opportunity to develop a venue capable of hosting international cricket matches, community and cultural events, and providing much-needed recreational green space for residents and visitors alike. The property is large enough to accommodate an international-size cricket field and, with the appropriate investment, has the potential to become an ICC-certified cricket ground. This status would allow us to host recognized cricket matches and position the Territory to attract regional and international competitions, bringing additional visitors, economic activity, and exposure to the Virgin Islands.

It is important to recognize that cricket in the United States is developing at a significant rate, with the establishment and expansion of nationalized major and minor leagues, and increased investment in the sport. It will be critical for the Territory to position itself ahead of this growth curve by investing in the necessary infrastructure and establishing the Virgin Islands as a competitive destination for cricket.

The STCA has been diligent in its pursuit of securing a permanent home for our organization and the cricket community. A favorable vote on this measure will move us one step closer to achieving that goal.

The approval of this lease is a critical step toward ensuring the long-term success and sustainability of cricket in the St. Thomas/St. John district. More importantly, it provides the Association with the certainty needed to responsibly invest in the property, pursue grants, attract private investment, and establish long-term partnerships that would otherwise be difficult to secure without a formal leasehold interest. Simply put, organizations and investors are far more willing to commit resources when there are long-term site control and a clear vision for the property's future.

The STCA and the cricketing community are grateful to the Legislature for appropriating \$1.5 million for this project, of which \$500,000 has been released to date. The Association has managed those funds responsibly and strategically, ensuring that every dollar invested advances the long-term development of the George E. Goodwin Cricket Grounds. To date, we have:

1. Advanced the site's architectural and engineering design to approximately 60 percent completion.
- Completed the conceptual Phase I development plan, which is currently estimated at approximately \$7 million.
- Purchased equipment necessary to maintain the grounds.
- Installed an irrigation system to preserve and improve the playing surface.
- Constructed and acquired temporary facilities to better accommodate players, officials, and spectators.

These investments have laid the foundation for the long-term development of the George E. Goodwin Cricket Grounds. However, additional work is needed to adequately support our current activities. Our immediate needs include topsoil to resurface a portion of the field and a temporary players' pavilion.

The association's strategy is to develop the facility in manageable phases rather than attempting to complete the entire project at once. The first phase focused on establishing the essential infrastructure needed to support cricket activities, including temporary facilities, concessions, and restrooms. Future phases will include the development of dedicated youth cricket facilities, improved spectator amenities, permanent structures, expanded parking, and ultimately the construction of an international-standard cricket venue capable of hosting regional and international competitions.

The Association recognizes that a project of this magnitude cannot rely solely on government appropriations. Our objective is to build a diversified capital program that combines public investment with private sector participation, grants, community fundraising, and revenue-generating initiatives. Our strategy includes:

- Seeking continued support from the Government of the Virgin Islands as a catalyst for future development.
- Establishing partnerships with private businesses interested in sponsoring pavilions, seating sections, scoreboards, buildings, or other permanent features through naming rights.
- Soliciting in-kind contributions of materials, equipment, and professional services from local contractors and suppliers.
- Launching an online fundraising platform to engage supporters and cricket enthusiasts around the world.
- Pursuing grants and partnerships through cricket governing bodies, philanthropic organizations, and sports development programs.

- Generating sustainable revenue through parking, tournaments, facility rentals, concessions, cultural events, youth programs, and corporate sponsorships to support the long-term operation and maintenance of the facility.

This public-private partnership approach reduces reliance on government funding while creating a financially sustainable model that will allow the George E. Goodwin Cricket Grounds to become a premier sports and community venue for generations to come.

Our Grassroots Cricket Program is conducted every Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. under the leadership of Mr. Bernard Douglas. The program currently serves approximately 15 young participants between the ages of 8 and 16. Our vision is to expand beyond Saturday programming by offering additional training sessions throughout the week, laying the foundation for an annual grassroots cricket festival, and ultimately introducing cricket into both public and private schools across the St. Thomas–St. John District. This initiative will create a structured pathway for youth development, foster greater community engagement, and ensure the long-term growth and sustainability of the sport.

In closing, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Bill No. 36-0293. Approving this lease is not simply about granting the St. Thomas Cricket Association the use of a parcel of land. It is about creating a lasting public asset that will serve the people of the Virgin Islands for decades to come. This project will provide opportunities for youth development, promote healthier communities, preserve an important part of our Caribbean cultural heritage, and position the Territory to capitalize on the growing sports tourism market. On behalf of the St. Thomas Cricket Association, I respectfully request your favorable consideration of Bill No. 36-0293. Thank you for your time and I remain available to answer any questions you or the members of the Committee may have.