

21ST VIRGIN ISLANDS BOARD OF EDUCATION

Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance
Bill No. 35-0133 Testimony - February 6, 2024



The mission of the Virgin Islands Board of Education is to provide leadership and oversight, set policy and advocate for continuous improvement of the Public Education System of the Virgin Islands of the United States.

VIRGIN ISLANDS BOARD OF EDUCATION
Bill No. 35-0133 TESTIMONY – Dr. Kyza A. Callwood

Good morning Honorable Chairperson Donna Frett Gregory, members of the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance, other members of the 35th legislature present, and the listening and viewing audiences. I am Dr. Kyza A. Callwood, chairman of the Virgin Islands Board of Education (hereinafter referred to as the VIBE (Virgin Islands Board of Education) or Board). Today I have with me in person Ms. Sylvanie Rhymer – Financial Aid Coordinator. I offer testimony on behalf of our governing board in support of Bill Number 35-0133 as amended, An Act amending title 17 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 15, relating to scholarships by adding section 190gg to establish an educational scholarship program to support individuals interested in pursuing a career in the maritime industry in the Virgin Islands.

The governing board supports this bill which holds significant importance for several reasons:

1. **Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities:** The maritime industry plays a crucial role in the economic development of the Virgin Islands. By supporting education in this sector, the region can foster a skilled workforce, creating job opportunities and contributing to economic growth.
2. **Investment in Local Talent:** Establishing a scholarship program of this magnitude demonstrates a commitment to investing in the local workforce. This helps individuals in the Virgin Islands access education and training, empowering them to contribute their skills and knowledge to the maritime industry.
3. **Addressing Skill Gaps:** The maritime industry often faces a shortage of skilled professionals. A dedicated scholarship program addresses this gap by encouraging and supporting individuals in acquiring the necessary qualifications, ensuring a competent workforce for the industry's diverse needs.
4. **Promoting Educational Excellence:** Scholarships incentivize academic excellence by recognizing and rewarding individuals committed to pursuing education in the maritime field. This, in turn, raises the overall educational standards within the community.
5. **Enhancing Maritime Safety:** Well-trained professionals contribute to enhanced safety standards within the maritime industry. By supporting education, the scholarship program indirectly contributes to promoting safe practices and preventing maritime incidents.
6. **Fostering Local Expertise:** A scholarship program encourages the development of local expertise within the maritime sector. This is essential for a sustainable and thriving industry that can address regional challenges and opportunities effectively.
7. **Global Competitiveness:** A well-educated and skilled maritime workforce enhances the global competitiveness of the Virgin Islands. Trained professionals can contribute to the industry's innovation and adaptability, positioning the region as a competitive player on the international stage.
8. **Community Development:** Supporting education in the maritime sector positively impacts the community by providing individuals with the tools to build successful careers. This, in turn, contributes to community development, prosperity, and improved living standards.

- 9. Long-Term Industry Sustainability:** Investing in education creates a pipeline of talent for the maritime industry, ensuring its long-term sustainability. A continuous influx of well-prepared professionals can adapt to evolving industry needs and technological advancements.
- 10. Diversity and Inclusion:** A scholarship program can promote diversity and inclusion within the maritime industry by providing opportunities to individuals from various backgrounds. This contributes to a more inclusive workforce, fostering creativity and innovation.

The approval of this bill through this noteworthy committee allows our graduating and continuing students the opportunity to apply for grant funding to support collegiate experiences and completion in potential areas in maritime studies or degrees which may include but not limited to the following: Marine Biology; Maritime Human Resource Management; Environmental Administration; Ocean Sustainability; Maritime Law & Policy; and Shipping & Transport Management to name a few. The potential areas mentioned add additional value to the maritime industry thus contributing significantly to our local community economically, socially, and culturally through the following ways:

- 1. Economic Impact:** The maritime industry often serves as an economic backbone for local communities. It generates employment opportunities across various sectors, including shipping, shipbuilding, logistics, and maritime services. Job creation, in turn, stimulates economic growth and enhances the standard of living within the community.
- 2. Cultural Heritage:** In many coastal communities, the maritime industry is deeply intertwined with cultural heritage. Traditions, customs, and local identities are often shaped by a community's historical connections to the sea, fishing, and maritime activities.
- 3. Education and Training Opportunities:** The maritime industry offers educational and training opportunities for community members. This includes maritime schools, vocational training, and scholarship programs, empowering individuals to pursue careers in this sector.
- 4. Resilience and Adaptability:** Communities with a diverse maritime industry are often more resilient and adaptable to economic changes. The industry's versatility allows for adjustments in response to global market shifts, contributing to the community's ability to weather economic challenges.

In summary, the maritime industry is a cornerstone of many local communities, influencing economic vitality, cultural identity, and the overall quality of life. Its multifaceted contributions make it an integral part of the fabric of coastal regions, the Virgin Islands, and around the world. By supporting Bill No. 35-0133 as amended, the Virgin Islands can actively contribute to the growth, sustainability, and competitiveness of the maritime industry while empowering its residents to pursue fulfilling careers in this vital sector. At this time, I offer congratulations to Senator Angel L. Bolques, Jr., the Bill sponsor, who happens to be the former At-Large member of the Virgin Islands Board of Education. Also, I want to express a heartfelt special thanks to all the champions of education. Your unwavering support for educational initiatives and opportunities is a beacon of hope for countless individuals. Whether through mentorship, scholarships, or

advocacy, you are making a lasting impact on the future. Together, we are building a brighter tomorrow through the power of education.

#EducationMatters #Gratitude #Changemakers

Madam Chair and members of the Budget, Appropriations and Finance committee, thank you for allowing us to provide this testimony. We remain available to respond to your questions at the appropriate time.