

PREPARED STATEMENT OF
HUGO V. HODGE, JR, CHAIRMAN OF THE
VIRGIN ISLANDS HORSE RACING COMMISSION
TO THE COMMITTEE ON CULTURE, SPORTS, PARKS, AGING & YOUTH
35TH LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS
August 25, 2023

Good day Honorable L. Angel Bolques, Jr., Chairman of the 35th Legislature's Committee on Culture, Sports, Parks, Aging & Youth, Honorable Senator Marvin A. Blyden, Vice-Chairman, Members of the Committee on Culture, Sports, Parks, Aging & Youth, Honorable Novelle E. James, Honorable Samuel Carrion, Honorable Alma Francis Heyliger, Honorable Franklin D. Johnson, and Honorable Milton E. Potter. Good day to the other members of the 35th Legislature present, testifiers, and the listening and viewing audience. My name is Hugo Vincent Hodge, Jr. and I continue to be humbled by the opportunity to serve the Virgin Islands as a member of the Virgin Islands Horse Racing Commission.

Honorable Senators on the Committee on Culture, Sports, Parks, Aging & Youth, I was asked to provide testimony providing input on the current state and progress of horse racing within our territory. Additionally, I have been asked to provide testimony on Bills 35-0073 & 35-0083.

The Virgin Islands Horse Racing Commission last convened for a public meeting on June 8th, 2023. In the hearing an update was received from Southland Gaming VI and

a written update from VIGL was read into the record. It is my understanding that both entities have been invited to provide testimony and both updates will be more current than the last received by the Commission. In addition to the updates there was a discussion on correspondence received from the Nadir Horse Owners & Trainers Association seeking permission to host exhibition races and other activities at the Clinton E. Phipps Racetrack. It was determined at that meeting that while the Commission is in favor of interim racing, the request would have to be considered by the GVI as they are the owner of the track and the only entity that could give such permission.

I will spend the majority of my testimony on Bills 35-0073 & 35-0083. Bill 35-0083 seeks to establish separate horse racing commissions for each district. Bill 35-0073 in turn establishes powers and duties for the horse racing commissions for each district and relating to antidoping of racehorses to provide for regulation by district and joint horse racing commissions.

I polled the Commission for feedback on these Bills and almost all were against the separation of the Commission. There was one response that spoke to the history of having separate Commissions, mentioned differentiation in benefit by district, and acknowledged that no state has multiple State Racing Commissions regardless of having one or more than one promoter in the state.

Personally, I am against anything that is divisive in this territory. I have stated on many occasions that, in my opinion, the greatest challenge facing the Virgin Islands is the economies of scale. Any Legislation that sets out to further exacerbate this challenge should be avoided. Having one Territorial/State racing commission makes the most sense

and is the practice in every state in the Union. It allows for one racing calendar and avoids potential scheduling conflicts. It also provides for one set of rules and regulations. The fact that having two racing commissions further requires the creation of a territorial board/commission may be the best indicator that one body is not only ideal, but also prudent.

In summary, the Virgin Islands Horse Racing Commission is functioning at the highest level and in the best interest of the industry for all stakeholders with absolutely no territorial issues. We stand ready to oversee the construction of both tracks, formalize rules and regulations, finalize the antidoping program, provide training and certification, and license the requisite professionals at both tracks. The Commission remains available to answer any questions that you may have.