

Good morning, follow the protocol of the members in the legislature.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in honor of the 60th anniversary of the Virgin Islands/Puerto Rico Friendship Committee. This milestone not only represents a significant achievement for our committee but also underscores the enduring bond between the people of the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

Since its inception, the Virgin Islands/Puerto Rico Friendship Committee has worked tirelessly to foster goodwill, cultural exchange, and unity between our two communities. What began as a humble initiative six decades ago has grown into a cherished tradition that continues to shape our shared identity. It is a celebration of the past, a recognition of the present, and an opportunity to shape a bright future together.

Celebrating the Past

As we reflect on the past 60 years, we honor the pioneers of this committee, whose vision and dedication established a foundation for cultural collaboration. Their work enabled Virgin Islanders and Puerto Ricans to build deep ties that have transcended generations. Through events, educational programs, and outreach initiatives, we have celebrated the heritage and contributions of both communities, acknowledging the rich history that connects us.

Recognizing the Present

Today, the committee remains a vibrant force, bringing together thousands of residents and visitors through annual celebrations such as the VIPR Village. These events foster a sense of unity, pride, and cultural awareness, promoting mutual understanding. We continue to honor our Puerto Rican brothers who have made meaningful contributions to the Virgin Islands, reminding us of the ongoing impact that collaboration between our communities has had.

Shaping the Future

As we look ahead, the Virgin Islands/Puerto Rico Friendship Committee 60th anniversary serves as a

pivotal moment to invest in the future. We aim to expand our efforts to engage younger generations and create more opportunities for cultural education and economic cooperation. With your support, we will ensure that the legacy of friendship between the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico continues to thrive for decades to come.

As we commemorate this significant milestone, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to this legislative body for the additional funding allocated to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Virgin Islands-Puerto Rico Friendship Committee. Thanks to your support, we have been able to expand our efforts, including the opening of the VIPR Village yesterday, which will remain open until Monday. In collaboration with the Department of Tourism, we are working to attract cruise ship visitors to experience our rich culture and heritage, further strengthening our community bonds and promoting cultural exchange.

Looking ahead, I humbly request that this legislative body consider allocating additional funding to the Virgin Islands/Puerto Rico Friendship Committee to support our ongoing efforts. This funding will be vital as we plan for future celebrations in the years to come, which we envision as landmark events that will highlight the strength of our cultural bonds and ensure that this cherished friendship continues to thrive for generations.

In closing, it is an honor to serve as President of this committee and to be part of a mission that unites two resilient and proud communities. Thank you for your continued support, and I look forward to working with you to ensure the ongoing success of the Virgin Islands-Puerto Rico Friendship Committee. To provide transparency, we have included a preliminary worksheet outlining our current expenses, and I will be providing a final detailed worksheet once the Village is closed and all expenses are accounted for. I look forward to seeing you at the VI/PR Village.