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VIA EMAIL

The Honorable Javan E. James
Chairman, Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture
3022 Golden Rock
Christiansted, VI 00820
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ST. CROIX CHAMBER OF COMMERCE'S WRITTEN TESTIMONY ON BILL 35-0257

Dear Chairman James:

The St. Croix Chamber of Commerce wholeheartedly supports Bill 35-0257, which seeks to create a Virgin Islands Beer, Wine and Spirits Festival to be held on the island of St. Croix. The reasons for our support are numerous and obvious. St. Croix is currently in a state of economic devastation. The business community continues to suffer under anti-business taxation, employment, and other laws, all while being shackled by the highest energy costs in the United States. To exit this economic malaise, St. Croix desperately needs to grow its tax base.

Creating a globally marketed festival in which St. Croix could market its world class rum production facilities and products would provide a well-needed shot in the arm to the Crucian economy. We already produce a large percentage of the world's rum. Indeed, the cumulative billions of dollars in proceeds from St. Croix's rum production have been used to "save" the territory time and again, with St. Croix receiving little appreciation for this heroic feat. It is time for St. Croix's rum production to be highlighted for the world to see. Doing so would not only increase visits to St. Croix for the festival; it would boost tourism generally, while creating a unique branding identity separate from St. Thomas-St. John's. The economic benefits of such a festival would be felt not only by the rum companies, but also by hotels, transportation companies, property owners, restaurants, and the like.

Bill 35-0257 is commonsense legislation aimed at boosting the Crucian economy while promoting St. Croix's unique contributions to the world. It should be approved and enacted immediately.

/s/ Akeel St. Jean

Akeel St. Jean, Esq.
Chairman
St. Croix Chamber of Commerce