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My Brother's Workshop  
PO Box 503205  
St Thomas, VI 00805

November 14, 2023

Legislature of the US Virgin Islands  
3022 Estate Golden Rock  
Christiansted, USVI 00802  
Committee on Education and Workforce Development

Good day,

Thank you to Madam Chair James, Madam Vice Chair Frett-Gregory, and Committee members Senator Joseph, Senator Capehart, Senator DeGraff, Senator James Sr., and Senator Johnson for having me here to testify to you.

I am Jenny Hawkes, Executive Director of My Brother's Workshop Inc., or as people call the organization MBW. Thank you for the privilege of addressing you today on the matter of workforce development programs and services provided in the US Virgin Islands.

MBW was founded in 2007 by Scott Bradley who currently still serves as our Program Director. The mission of MBW is to provide faith and hope to at-risk and high-risk youth, ages 16-24, both male and female, in the USVI through mentoring, mental health counseling, education, vocational training, and job placement.

Since the beginning, MBW has played a vital role in the success of our youth and community by helping young people gain skills that increase their chances of employment. The youth enter the MBW programs and are placed immediately in simulated work environments to learn endurance, workplace safety, communication skills, and a strong work ethic while gaining experience that will help them succeed in their next goal.

Because we believe in individuals learning at different rates, our youth are on average at MBW for 9-12 months and earn stipends and wages along the way becoming taxpayers. With the

wrap-around services of mentoring and mental health counseling administered by our full-time social worker, students at MBW not only learn valuable skills for employment but also learn how to interact with supervisors and coworkers and for some learn the ways to heal from childhood trauma. If a student enters an MBW vocational training program and has not received a high school diploma through traditional means, he or she is required to enroll in an online program that allows the student to finish his or her high school diploma.

Currently, MBW has vocational training in St Thomas with construction, carpentry, plumbing, electrical, masonry, and marine repair and maintenance at the workshop in Tutu and culinary arts and customer services at the café and bakery downtown and retail experience at our Paradise Point location. On St Croix, the MBW workshop is located in Castle Coakley and focuses on construction and carpentry skills. Additionally, on St Thomas, MBW is also building a main campus behind Home Depot that will increase our capacity from 100 students a year to the ability to serve over 300 with Building One which is in construction. Once all the buildings are completed, the capacity could increase up to 800-1,000 annually.

As the USVI is still recovering from the aftermath of the storms in 2017 and the pandemic, our youth face many challenges that include the stress of where and how families will live with increased inflation, childhood trauma, struggles in education, and lack of resources, and emotional stress from social media, just to name a few. Assisting a young person in finding employment is a step in the right direction but if we do not address the additional pressures and stress, many youth will continue to have challenges staying employed or advancing in their chosen careers.

With the primary goal being to help our young people choose their path and help them acquire the tools needed to succeed, MBW is committed to being a sanctuary for young people to heal and find their way in this world. To date, MBW has worked with over 1,500 young people to identify their passions and help them reach their goals.

As an organization, MBW stands ready to create and implement programs that help advance our youth and help shape them to be the next group of leaders. I look forward to any questions or discussions on this topic.

Sincerely,



Jenny Hawkes  
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