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Honorable Marise C. James, Esq., Chair, Committee on Education and Workforce Development
Legislature of the Virgin Islands
3022 Estate Golden Rock
Christiansted, USVI 00820

Testimony: University of the Virgin Islands Center for Excellence in Leadership and Learning (UVI CELL); Role in the VI Workforce Development System

Good day, Honorable Chair Marise C. James, Esq., members of the Committee on Education and Workforce Development, other members of the 35th Legislature, and to the listening and viewing audience. My name is Dr. Suzanne Darrow-Magras; I am the Director of the University of the Virgin Islands Center for Excellence in Leadership and Learning (UVI CELL). I appreciate the opportunity to share information on UVI CELL's role in the VI workforce development system, including the workforce development programs and the services we provide to help people find, prepare for, and maintain employment given the serious shortage of skilled workers and family-wage jobs in the territory.

UVI CELL was established through a Legislative appropriation to UVI in 2002 to meet the workforce and professional development training needs critical to the economic prosperity of the Virgin Islands. With facilities and staff on both UVI campuses, UVI CELL is committed to supporting the intellectual and professional development and transformation of students and the workforce in the Virgin Islands, wider Caribbean, and the world as part of the University's mission; and to serve as the premier institute for personal enrichment and consultancy, locally and globally through innovative leadership and collaborative partnerships. UVI CELL is accredited through the International Accreditors for Continuing Education and Training (IACET).

UVI CELL uses a comprehensive, collaborative process to establish annual goals and report outcomes, ensuring alignment with the University's strategic priorities across our three service lines: Workforce Development, Community Engagement and Business Development Services. Our goals are based on our core mission, the needs of our students and customers, industry trends, and the evolving continuing and higher education landscape.

UVI CELL serves a diverse range of customers including:

- Local Workforce –members of the USVI workforce seeking professional development and workforce training programs, including incumbent workers, youth and adults.
- Community Members - individuals who engage with community outreach initiatives and take part in training programs, events, and services.

- Government Agencies, Community Organizations and Local Businesses - through development of strategic plans and engagements aimed at enhancing the workforce, driving operational improvement and fostering economic development.
- University Partners - collaborating with various university departments for goal alignment and program integration.

There are ten full-time CELL staff members between the two UVI campuses, along with four student workers and 10-20 part-time, adjunct faculty and contracted team members, given program needs. On the Orville E. Kean Campus on St. Thomas, we are located in Faculty East where our offices and assessment center are located, and our Aviation and Culinary Arts Program and UVI CELL restaurant, Wild Sage, are located in the UVI 13D Research and Strategy Innovation Center. On the St. Croix Albert A. Sheen Campus, UVI CELL offices are located in Rooms BB101 and BB103, and our Aviation Program and assessment center are located in the Innovation Center in the Library. We are working in partnership with the VI Department of Education to establish a St. John location on for our Adult Education programs.

UVI CELL maintains an online email marketing system and Facebook and Instagram pages to share updates with over 6,600 subscribers. The community can subscribe to updates by visiting cell.uvi.edu, and can obtain program information by emailing cell@uvi.edu, or calling on St. Croix, (340) 692-4230 and on St. Thomas, (340) 693-1100.

UVI CELL strives to be revenue-generating and self-sustaining, and we have grown exponentially over the past four years, with annual operating revenue, federal grants, local contracts and donations totaling approximately \$2.7 million. In FY23, we served over 2200 customers with a wide array of in-person and online programs and services including:

- VI Department of Labor, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs in demand areas including Renewable Energy Specialist, Administrative Assistant, Clinical Medical Assistant, Childcare Worker, Culinary Arts Program, and Penn Foster High School. Through the Skills for Today program, we provided Workforce Readiness and Career Navigation services to program participants, and a custom Line Cook program, and offered Grant Management, Project Management, and Data Science courses for incumbent workers responsible for Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery grants (CDBG-R).
- VI Department of Education (VIDE), WIOA Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Grant (AEFLA), where we have partnered with the VIDE to expand and offer Adult Basic Education, GED, ESL and Citizenship programs. We also offer a VI History and Culture course for local educators to meet certification requirements and online certification coursework for VI Career and Technical Education instructors, as approved through the VI Board for Career and Technical Education.
- American Culinary Federation (ACF) Certified Fundamentals Cook and Pastry Cook program, through our student-run restaurant, Wild Sage on St. Thomas, and our Diageo-sponsored Learning Skills for Life Bartending program on both campus. Our Culinary program on St. Croix will launch in the new year. We also partner with the VI Professional Charter Association to support Customer Service training for the Marine Apprenticeship Program.
- EDA University Center, where we are subgrantees to the University of Puerto Rico Mayaguez, www.uviregion.com #2 John Brewers Bay • St. Thomas • U.S. Virgin Islands 00802-9990 • Tel: (340) 693-1101/(340) 692-3191

and offer Entrepreneurship courses, one-on-one mentoring and small business support, including a custom Veteran's Entrepreneurship course. We partner with the SBDC, the UVI RT Park and VI SCORE. All VI Veterans are eligible for free tuition for all UVI CELL courses through the Veteran's Affairs Office. The VI EDA Office often refers potential EDC Beneficiary participants to UVI CELL for connection with the University on continuing education, grant partnerships and workforce development opportunities.

- Bureau of Corrections in-facility and reentry education programs including high school, career and technical education programs, entrepreneurship, parenting, cognitive/behavioral programs, workforce preparation and employment assistance programs. UVI CELL supports monthly public Reentry Action Group and Reentry Housing Workgroup Committee meetings. We actively work with law-enforcement partners to support public safety and the rehabilitation of those impacted by the criminal justice system.
- FAA High School Aviation grant program, Coral Wings, for certified private pilot and certified commercial drone pilots, including FAA testing and quarterly Caribbean Aeronautical Advisory Group meetings for aviation stakeholders.
- VI Division of Personnel, Certified Public Manager Program.
- VI Fire and Emergency Medical Services, Emergency Medical Responder (EMR) and Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) Bridge programs.
- EmpowerU Youth Summit (formerly 'Man Up'), including panel discussions and breakout sessions to prepare youth for post-secondary education and workforce transitions, and in support of mental health awareness and social well-being.
- Assessment services, including the UVI Entrance Exam, Prometric, PSI, PAN, TEAS and Kryterion testing, and other certification exams including VI licensure exams in partnership with the VI Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs.
- Thousands of self-paced online courses, professional development and certification programs are available through our CELL student platform.

The following programs will launch in the new year:

- Surveyor Technician Certificate Program, in collaboration with St. Petersburg College in Florida, and the Certified Residential Appraiser Program, sponsored by the VI Legislature.
- Cannabis Commerce course, providing a foundational understanding of the industry and the soon-to-be approved VI Office of Cannabis Regulations rules, supporting equity efforts to ensure VI locals lead in the Cannabis industry, delivered in partnership with Oaksterdam University.
- VI Department of Public Works, incumbent worker training and Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE), Business Development and Entrepreneurship Training.
- Taxi and Tour Certificate Program, in collaboration with the VI Taxicab Commission and the VI Department of Tourism.

- VI Department of Health, Community Health Worker Certificate Program, Train the Trainer and Apprenticeship Program.

As the Director of UVI CELL, my role is required on the VI Board for Career and Technical Education, where I serve as Secretary. I was also appointed by Governor Bryan in 2021 to serve as the Chair of the VI State Apprenticeship Council and the Chair's role is a required position on the VI Workforce Board. These positions support program alignment across the education and workforce development spectrum.

In the new year, UVI CELL looks forward to further integrating our programs into an innovative UVI model that embraces all students, through establishing dual enrollment programs with local high schools, enhancing employment partnerships and career services, applying for UVI credit for CELL programs, pursuing "Ability to Benefit" Pell Grant funding, and technology platform upgrades to merge CELL student data, transcripts and programs with the for-credit, academic side of the University. These steps will allow for UVI's growth in a greater number of relevant, in-demand industry programs, support UVI enrollment goals and ensure for an inclusive and welcoming campus for our diverse community members.

Chair James, this concludes my testimony. Thank you for the invitation to provide information on UVI CELL's role in the VI workforce development system. I thank you for the opportunity to testify before this Committee and welcome any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Suzanne Darrow-Magras, PhD
Director, UVI CELL