

Testimony for Almando Rocky Liburd

Support for Bill to Honor Almando “Rocky” Liburd and name the North Shore Road, The Almando “Rocky” Liburd Highway

Warmest Greetings to you, the members of the 35th Legislature. You are making history by honoring a Son of the Soil, the Honorable Almando Liburd, who is fondly called, “Rocky” or even to Spanish speakers – “Roquito.” And today, I am expressing profound appreciation to Senator Angel Bolques, Jr. As a Native St. Johnian, your sponsorship of this bill honors our ancestors. “Our” is the correct pronoun since I also have deep St. Johnian roots, and I am always moved when the small island, Love City, achieves greatness.

Our brethren to the West, Borinquen or Puerto Rico, called Vieques, la Nena, as a term of affection and respect for that island. Love City is likewise a fitting name for St. John because that smaller sister-island has been the fountain of love and dedication in the St. Thomas-St. John District, and it is a gem within the entire Virgin Islands. That St. John would be the birthplace of Rocky is no coincidence. As is well known, Rocky has deep roots in the Greater Virgin Islands and even Nevis. Living on a small island that is in the shadows of bigger islands can impose on us a flight, fright, and fight response. Many St. Johnians have had to leave St. John due to a lack of opportunity. Some have grown to fear difficult living conditions. Then there are those who fight to improve their own lives and those others who live in St. John or live abroad but have socio-economic ties to St. John.

Rocky grew up to become a Spanish teacher, part-time university instructor, legislator, and community leader. He fought for St. John. His finest hours were as the at-large senator. As you all know, representing a district is also a task. Rocky had to represent St. John in one sense and then represent the entire Territory in another sense. Of course, he continued the progressive tradition of other great St. Johnian senators such as Julius Sprauve, Theobald Moorhead, and Cleon Creque Maynard. But Rocky ascended to the presidency twice!

Members of the 35th Legislature, you have come in the good days. When Rocky was a senator, and Senate President twice, he had to contend with the giants of the Virgin Islands political system. Do you know who were these giants? In the Legislature---Adelbert Bryan, Alicia “Chucky” Hansen, Celestino White, Lorraine Berry, Roosevelt David, and others. In the Executive branch—Roy Schneider, Kenneth Mapp, and Charles Turnbull. These were very forceful, strong-willed leaders, and Rocky had to mediate and find common ground with them. He displayed immense emotional intelligence, calm demeanor, dignified composure, and cultural wisdom. He was an ICM-er with Democratic Party support. He had to find creative ways to ensure that the Community benefited from the unique genius and skills of each elected and appointed leader and civil servant.

Suffice it to say, Rocky was Senate President when Hurricane Marilyn struck. It was a dreadful period. Governor Roy Schneider had to step up. Lt. Governor Kenneth Mapp had to deal with insurance bankruptcies. The legislature had to find new ways to balance the budget and provide relief and support for the Territory. I believe all of you were here in the Territory when Hurricane Marilyn hit us, and each of

you played your own indispensable role. But at that time, Rocky had to be an extraordinary leader - like no other Senate President had to. He had to become the Acting Lt. Governor on numerous occasions when society was in deep distress. This detail is important, and as we review his numerous bills that improved our lives, I take note that Rocky remained a role model of modesty, respect, and good conduct at the height of his leadership of this body.

Finally, I am not aware of all the reasons why you selected North Shore Road as the place to name in Rocky's honor, but I can assure you, that it is fitting. As a student of History, I must inform you that this road is sacred ground. This part of St. John was the base of the 1733 insurrection and many of the fighters walked on that road of liberation. They fought against slavery from that part of St. John. And other Africans in pursuit of freedom used the northern part of the island to flee to the British Virgin Islands. So, this naming of the North Shore Road in Almando Rocky Liburd's honor, is a historic decision on the 175th Anniversary of the Emancipation of enslaved Africans in the Virgin Islands. Our Ancestors are blessed!

Unconditionally, I support this measure.

Sincerely,

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