

Testimony in Support of Bill No. 34-0074

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Good afternoon to the Honorable Carla J. Joseph, Chairwoman of the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection; members of the committee; other senators present; staff; fellow testifiers; and members of the viewing and listening audience. My name is Rudy Krigger, Jr., and I am honored to testify today in support of *Bill No. 35-0074, An Act honoring and commending former Senator Almando "Rocky" Liburd for his lifetime of service to the people of the Virgin Islands especially St. John, and renaming the North Shore Road on St. John "The Almando "Rocky" Liburd Highway"*.

It is wonderful to speak about my mentor, former Senator-at-Large Almando Liburd, who I will sometimes refer to (because I cannot help it) as "Rocky". However, I must say that it is also difficult for two reasons. First, because I am accustomed to being on the other side of this table, preparing what I hope will be tough questions, and watching the testifiers sweat. Now, as I sit here, I wonder whether it's just me or did it suddenly get hot in here! Second, and most importantly, it is truly a tough job to say, in so short a time, all that should be said about a man who has done so much for the Virgin Islands, and who I know in so many ways.

I worked for Senator Almando "Rocky" Liburd for five terms, I competed against him in various sports for over thirty years, and we shared together in the triumphs and tragedies that visit us all in our public and personal lives. In the three decades that I've been associated with him we have come to be brothers. And I am proud to declare today, without fear of contradiction, that Almando "Rocky" Liburd is one of the finest public servants that this community will ever have, and he is also one of the most decent human beings to grace public life in this territory.

We have seen the voluminous list of accomplishments and contributions in Senator Liburd's legislative record. However, I must add just a few more. We all know that property tax issues have long been a thorn in the side for the people of the Virgin Islands in general and the people of St. John in particular, and we know that for many years, a 1936 federal law prevented the Virgin Islands government from being able to enact laws to protect local property owners. What many don't know is that it was

Almando "Rocky" Liburd who spurred Congress to repeal that law and empower the Virgin Islands government to enact property tax laws as necessary to protect its people.

Similarly, people may know that Senator Liburd passed Act No. 6123, requiring firearms to be registered within 24 hours of entering the territory. What is less known is that in the language of that measure, Almando "Rocky" Liburd almost single-handedly brought about one of the territory's most significant gun reforms in the last fifty years! Before the passage of that act, a person could not be prosecuted for possession of a firearm in the Virgin Islands unless the weapon was on or immediately about their person. So, we had cases where people were found with arsenals of illegal weapons on their boats, or in their homes, but couldn't be charged. It was Rocky who found the means to fix that problem through the concept of "constructive possession", and I might add that he had to fight through some of the better-known legal minds in the territory to get it passed. But without his creativity, his commitment, and his work, many more violent criminals, and many more illegal firearms, would be out on our streets today.

With the remaining time, I would like to talk about the type of person that Rocky is, and about the sense of humanity, humility and love that he brought to the Senate, and to Virgin Islands public life. As a boss, he was clear about what his expectations were, and he had his unmistakable way of letting an employee know when he was pleased, or less than pleased, with the quality of work. Yet, he was as approachable as any supervisor could be, and was willing to listen patiently, (and almost endlessly, if you know his researcher) to opposing viewpoints before he made his final decision, which was always his own. Further, he had great faith in the potential of young people, and his office was the place in which many stellar careers in public and private life got started, and where a few were even revived.

In an environment where it is all too easy to buy into the concept that those on the other side of the political aisle are to be beaten and starved into submission, Senator Liburd-- whether as Senate President, Legislative Secretary, or as a member of the minority-- treated all with genuine kindness and respect, and worked with ALL senators and people of goodwill, regardless of party or affiliation. And for this he was and is beloved and respected by people of all political persuasions and from all walks of life.

But I must also warn you not to be fooled. There were many who foolishly mistook kindness for weakness, and while many found out the "Real Deal" to their surprise and discomfort, there were still many others who never caught on to something very

important. This mild-mannered, self-described 'simple fellow from Coral Bay', just happens to be an expert level chess player who still holds his own with players who represent the Virgin Islands in international competition. He also is a near-expert level player in pocket billiards, and is an absolute killer in dominoes and bid whist—all competitive endeavors that require a great memory, tremendous strategic ability, and a desire to win!

In fact, the only thing I ever saw Rocky attempt that he wasn't naturally good at was singing calypso. At the Senate Calypso tents of the 1990's, he earned the name "The Mighty Bragadam", because whenever he would "bus" and forget his lyrics (which was often) he would always fall back on one phrase, "Bragadam, Bragadam"!

On a more serious note, Senator Liburd was also famous in his office, perhaps spoiling his researcher for life, for his ability to read and digest a complex bill and accompanying bill analysis in just a few minutes, and then go forth and discuss the details of the legislation with the best of them! In short, Rocky Liburd was ALWAYS two steps ahead of where everyone else thought the situation was. And his legislative record and efforts show this. We are just now catching up to some of the policy initiatives that Senator Liburd was taking on three decades ago!

Lastly, I cannot speak about Almando "Rocky" Liburd without addressing his contributions outside of public office. All too many people present themselves to be chosen as the community's leaders, but when they are not in public office we see or hear nothing of them. Almando "Rocky" Liburd, to the contrary, has continued to give to the community, in good times and bad. We hear him regularly with Neville James and the crew on "Analyze This" which, in keeping with Rocky's character, is widely acclaimed as the most thoughtful talk show in Virgin Islands radio. And we must also remember that in the days and weeks after Hurricanes Irma and Maria, it was often Rocky's voice on WSTA, filling in for Addie Ottley, that kept us in touch with each other and with the world when there was no other point of contact. Moreover, Rocky displayed a sense of calm, of patience, and of compassion at a time when this community needed those things most. And in just about every situation where a knowledgeable, calm person is needed to provide a penetrating analysis of the community's politics or public policies, you will most likely find Rocky Liburd.

I could go on for hours talking about Senator Almando "Rocky" Liburd, about what he has given to this community, and about why he is deserving of every honor and

commendation that this body can bestow. But in closing summary, the bill before this body rightfully celebrates and recognizes a Virgin Islander of immense talent, a great leader, and perhaps most importantly, a good and decent man. I would like to thank Senator-at-Large Angel Bolques and Senator Marvin Blyden, who collaborated to recognize and salute Senator Liburd's tremendous contribution to our people, and I urge all members of this body to give Bill No. 35-0074 your enthusiastic and unanimous support. Thank you, and may God Bless the Virgin Islands.