

VIA EMAIL (senatorcarlajoseph@legvi.org)

Honorable Carla Joseph

35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands

Chairwoman, Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs,

and Consumer Protection

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RE: My Support of Bill # 35-0100-- A Resolution honoring and commending Music in Motion

School of Higher Dance and founder Charlita Schuster

July 10, 2023

Good afternoon, Chairwoman Carla Joseph and esteemed members of the Committee on Government Operation, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection. I want to express my gratitude for the opportunity to testify today in support of Bill No. 35-0100, a Resolution honoring and commending Music in Motion School of Higher Dance Education (MIMSHD) and its founder, Charlita Schuster, on their 40th Anniversary of dance instruction, performance, and non-profit service to art education.

My name is Emmanuella Perez-Cassius, and I am a fellow youth developer, a board member of the MIMSHD, and, most importantly, a proud "Dance Mom!" Today, I want to share the immense

impact that dance education, mainly through MIMSHD, has had on our community and my aspiring professional dancers.

As a mother, I am grateful for the opportunity the school has provided for my youngest daughter, Marley Cassius, to develop her natural love for the art of dance. Marley started dancing with MIMSHD in 2016 when I returned to St. Croix. Over the past eight years, Ms. Schuster has consistently provided dance skill development, instilled discipline, and cultivated a professional approach to training in Marley. Additionally, she has given Marley the confidence to embrace challenges, learn from failures, and persevere through difficulties.

MIMSHD, like many organizations and businesses in the Virgin Islands, has faced numerous challenges over its 40-year history, including funding shortages and surviving multiple hurricanes. However, Charlita's dedication to teaching dance has remained unwavering. Regardless of the circumstances, she has found ways to continue providing dance classes in studios, schools, living rooms, or online. This commitment to the art and her students is truly commendable.

My support for Ms. Schuster and MIMSHD grew significantly in 2018 when I joined the St. Croix Foundation Non-profit consortium. I witnessed first-hand the positive impact MIMSHD has on St. Croix's art education. During that time, I learned from Charlita her original vision in establishing the Music in Motion Dance School forty years ago was to introduce the professional art of Ballet to the Virgin Islands. Something that she loved, something that impacted her young life. Despite the challenges faced, she consistently delivered high-quality dance education, nurtured artistic talent, and contributed to the cultural vibrancy of St. Croix.

In my professional experience, I understand the paramount importance of providing young people with a safe and nurturing space for learning and development. I know the transformative power

that consistent engagement can have on the lives of children. It goes beyond the excellence in dance skills; it encompasses the genuine relationships that foster students' overall growth.

Charlita Schuster's remarkable 40-year commitment to providing healthy youth development to the children of the Virgin Islands is a true gift to her home. Through movement, she created an environment where young individuals can develop their artistic talents and build character, discipline, and resilience. This comprehensive approach to education and mentorship has a profound and lasting impact on the lives of these children.

Exposing VI children to diverse artistic expressions, Charlita broadens their horizons and opens doors to new possibilities. This exposure to creativity, fosters self-expression, and instills in them a love for the arts that will last a lifetime. These relationships extend beyond the studio and often become lifelong connections, forming stronger ties to a community that supported and uplifted them.

As I testify today, I speak not only as a witness to the incredible impact Charlita and MIMSHD has on our community but also as someone who understands the profound significance of youth development. Through her unwavering commitment to the children of the Virgin Islands, Charlita has created a legacy of empowerment, artistic expression, and personal growth. Her dedication deserves the highest recognition, and the resolution before you is a fitting tribute to her exceptional contributions.

Thank you for your attention and consideration of my testimony. I implore the Committee to support the resolution honoring Music in Motion School of Higher Dance Education and Charlita Schuster. By doing so, we affirm the importance of youth development and the transformative power of the arts in shaping the lives of our future generation.

Sincerely,

Emmanuella Perez-Cassius

Testifier

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