

Testimony of  
**Afrilasia Joseph-Phipps**

Regarding Bill No. 35-0100

35<sup>th</sup> Legislature's Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer  
Protection

Wednesday, July 12, 2023, 2:00 PM  
Legislature of the Virgin Islands  
3022 Estate Golden Rock  
Christiansted, VI 00820

Good afternoon, Committee Chairperson, Senator Carla Joseph, Bill sponsor, Senator Samuel Carrion and all other members of the 35<sup>th</sup> Legislature's Committee on Government Operations, Veteran's Affairs and Consumer Protection. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Music In Motion School of Higher Dance Education.

My name is Afrilasia Joseph-Phipps. Forty-one years ago, while a student at the St. Croix School of the Arts, I met Ms. Charlita Schuster who was employed there as a dance teacher. I was a student on scholarship, where I trained in visual and performing arts.

My time at the St. Croix School of the arts was short lived, as was Ms. Schuster's employment, because her superiors instructed her not to correct me, as I was observed to have a natural talent. As a woman with a vision and a belief in her ability to foster excellence in students aspiring to learn dance, Ms. Shuster decided she could not work under the limitations being imposed on her. She decided to move on, determined to create an environment that would enable her to freely teach and nurture the talents of her students.

In 1983 Ms. Schuster opened the doors to Music In Motion Dance Academy, now known as Music in Motion School of Higher Dance Education and has never looked back. Eager to continue my training under her tutelage, I became the first student enrolled at her Academy. Little did I know that this was the beginning of a lifetime of friendship and mentorship.

At Music in Motion, I learned all forms of dance genres, but my foundation was classical ballet. Dance training taught me how to be graceful, poised, disciplined, and brought out my natural creativity and ability to perform as a ballet dancer. Most importantly it helped me build lots and lots of courage and confidence. In short, my years at MIM helped me become the woman I am today.

These skillsets positioned me to earn a reputation as one of the best dancers in the history of these Virgin Islands. Schuster's nurturing support empowered me and helped me succeed in other areas of my professional life, as it no doubt has done for others. I owe all this and more to her, for the time, patience, and guidance that she bestowed upon me.

My dance training under Ms. Schuster gave me the self-confidence I needed to perform amongst the best professionals in the dance world. It also gave me the opportunity to travel beyond St. Croix for advanced dance training with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre and Ballet Florida. In addition, Ms. Schuster coached and choreographed all dance routines that led me to capture several titles among which include Miss Arthur A. Richards Junior High School, Miss Virgin Islands High School, and the crème de la crème of teen pageants, Hal Jackson's Virgin Islands Talented Teen Contest and Hal Jackson's International Talented Teen (first runner-up). As a young adult, I also competed and placed first runner up in the Miss Caribbean Queen Contest in Martinique, French West Indies.

Over a span of 40 years, I have watched many students enrolled at the Music In Motion School of Higher Dance Education become actors, dance teachers, professional dancers, gymnasts, and other highly qualified experts in their respective careers. Music In Motion School of Higher Dance Education has been my personal preference and has also helped to develop my daughter, Alayah's character, and confidence as a performer. Today, I continue to seek out Ms. Schuster's advice, ideas, and expertise as it relates to dance and the performing arts. She is a phenomenal teacher, director and producer of dance productions performed throughout the island of St. Croix, usually to 'standing room only' audiences.

Ms. Charlita Schuster has demonstrated a true commitment to her students and our Virgin Islands community. Her passion for dance and her devotion to the performing arts is exemplary,

as she continues to cultivate the talent of many young aspirants in our community. Ms. Schuster and Music in Motion has been a blessing to me, and I am forever thankful for all the life lessons that were instilled in me.

In conclusion, I recommend the passing of Bill *No. 35-0100* honoring and commending Music in Motion School of Higher Dance Education and its founder, Charlita Schuster, on the 40th Anniversary of the establishment of the Music in Motion Dance Academy. I also urge all parents in our Virgin Islands community to invest in their child's future through the arts. It lends to a well-rounded individual. Thank you for your time and attention to my story.