

Testimony on BILL 35-0075

Senator Myron D. Jackson

May 31, 2023

Legislature of the Virgin Islands

St. Thomas, Virgin Islands of the United States

Good afternoon the Honorable Senator Carla Joseph, Chairman of the Committee on Government Operation Veterans Affairs and Consumer Protection, and Honorable Senators of the Committee and in attendance, my name is Myron D. Jackson , retired Senator and former Senate President of this august body. Thank you for the invitation to testify on Bill 35-0075 an Act to designate the third Monday in February as Virgin Islands Governors Day sponsored by Senator Angel L. Bolques, Jr.

This year on July 3rd, the Territory will observe and commemorate the 175th anniversary of Emancipation of our enslaved African ancestors, in the former Danish West Indies, know today as the Virgin Islands of the United States. The Emancipation Proclamation issued by the Governor General Peter von Scholten, that day in 1848, was the result of the unification, and call for action of our ancestors to free themselves from the tyranny of enslavement, and the inhumane conditions and injustices suffered and endured under institution of slavery under the colonial rule of the Kingdom of Denmark. The subsequent years, decades, and century is well documented of our continued struggle for liberty, equality, and self-determination. Today, we reap those told and untold sagas that permit us to sit in these seats, in this place, and in this time, to determine our faith, our aspirations, and our future under the banner and motto of our emblem “United in Pride and Hope”.

As a child growing up in the Virgin Islands, U.S., you became acquainted with the name of communities, institutions, landmarks and scared places. Our educational facilities were then named for U.S. Presidents: Washington School, Jefferson School, Monroe School, Madison School and Lincoln School. In our legislative history and archives you should find the evolution and the legislative history of the renaming of the above referenced schools to renowned Virgin Islands educators and contributing citizens: Ulla Muller Elementary School, Jarvis Annex, Sibilly School, J. Antonio Jarvis School, and Edith William Elementary School. Did this bold and conscious movement change the culture and psyche of us as a people? Was there a greater sense of pride and identity fostered by these legislative mandates? Today, as you traverse the streets, roadways, byways and highways of the Territory you witness road signs of noted community, civic and cultural leaders of the Virgin Islands enacted by law by this august body. Bill 35-0075 before this Committee today would makes some pause, how dear you consider the third Monday in February, that celebrates the Federal holiday, President Day, as Virgin Islands Governors Day! The same can be said of the Federal holiday Columbus Day, that was also codified in the Virgin Islands Code as Virgin Island Puerto Rico Friendship Day. The point I am trying to illustrate in my remarks is why not!

This year marks the 106th anniversary of the sale and transfer of the former Danish West Indies to the United States. It took our agitation and advocacy in the Territory and in the halls of Congress to grant Virgin Islanders, ten years after the Transfer, US citizenship. For over a century we have demonstrated our allegiance, we committed our young men and petitioned

Congress to serve, and fight in conflicts and in time of wars. Our annual petitions at party and legislative conventions, and in the halls of Congress for the right to vote as full American citizens for President, in the Territories, is denied and we remain second class citizens in an incorporated status of colony. Our very own Delegate to Congress, and others from US Territories, don't have the right to vote in committees or on the floor. What does Presidents Day mean to American citizen in US Territories, a right denied.

In our struggles for self-governance we fought for the right to elect our own Governors. An achievement that should not forgotten and should be celebrated. August body, I stand in support of BILL 35-0075 an Act to designate the third Monday in February as Virgin Islands Governors Day, and I encourage you to vote favorable for the Bill in this Committee and advance it to the full body for adoption.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this historic and impactful legislation!