



TESTIMONY OF PRESIDENT DAVID HALL  
UNIVERSITY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT  
OPERATIONS, VETERANS AFFAIRS AND  
CONSUMER PROTECTION

35<sup>TH</sup> LEGISLATURE  
OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

EARLE B. OTTLEY LEGISLATIVE HALL

ST. THOMAS

FEBRUARY 27, 2024

Good afternoon, Chairwoman Joseph and members of the Committee on Government Operations, Veteran Affairs and Consumer Protection and other members of the 35th Legislature present, other testifiers, members of the press, persons in the viewing and listening audience, ladies, and gentlemen. My name is David Hall, President of the University of the Virgin Islands, and it is indeed an honor for me to appear before the Committee to offer testimony on behalf of the University of the Virgin Islands.

I have been asked to provide testimony regarding Bill No. 35-0107, an Act posthumously honoring and commending Dr. Fenella Cooper for her contributions to the fields of education, sports, and culture, and naming the UVI tennis courts on the Orville E. Kean Campus on St. Thomas in her honor.

The tennis courts on the Orville E. Kean Campus are very special fixtures at the University of the Virgin Islands, not only for students and employees, but also for community members. It is sometimes used even more by members of the community than our own students. Thus, the University supports this effort to name the facility after Dr. Cooper. From everything I have read in the proposed Bill and what I have heard from others, she was an important person in Virgin Islands sports history and has contributed greatly to the sport for which she is being honored. She is a graduate of the University (CVI), and taught at the University, in addition to numerous public education institutions in the Territory. I will not repeat all the facts, accomplishments and accolades contained in the Bill, but they do point to the fact that Dr. Cooper has excelled in sports, in education and in life.

It should also be noted that Dr. Cooper's family is an anchor at UVI. Her husband, Dr. Vincent Cooper, before his retirement, was one of our longest serving faculty members, and contributed greatly to the preservation and dissemination of Virgin Islands culture and history. Her daughter, Dara Cooper, worked in our Cooperative Extension Program, the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences and at WUVI for numerous years. Some of Dr. Cooper's grandchildren have also attended UVI and excelled. Therefore, this is not just a fitting honor for one distinguished person, but for a distinguished family.

As I have done in the past, I want to remind this Committee that it is easy to name a building, campus, or tennis court after distinguished individuals. But if we want to be true to their legacy and to future generations who want to know them and follow them, then this body needs to do more. Our Plant Fund, which addresses deferred maintenance and makes needed repairs to our facilities, is underfunded and insufficient to care for the facilities we own. Once we name one of those facilities

after someone, there should be an even greater commitment to make sure that they are cared for and enhanced for years to come. When private individuals or corporations secure naming rights, they provide endowment funds so the facility can be cared for and enhanced for years to come. The government needs to do the same.

In addition, we are naming these tennis courts after a distinguished local tennis player and educator, and yet the University where these courts exist, cannot afford to have a tennis program that trains the next generation of Fenella Cooper. Our Athletic Department supports track and field and basketball but does not have enough funds to hire a coach and field a team so that our students can be trained and compete against other universities. What would make this Bill more meaningful is that you amend it to provide funding for annual maintenance and funding for a tennis program and team at UVI. In the Bill it states that “Dr. Cooper helped to organize and conduct tennis workshops for junior and adult players in the U.S. Virgin Islands, the British Virgin Islands, and elsewhere in the Caribbean and in the mainland United States.” The University can’t continue that part of her legacy and we need the Senate to assist with that goal. This is how we keep the legacy and spirit of Caribbean people alive. We not only name facilities after them, but we ensure that something new and different occurs so that we leave the facility and the people better than we found them.

So, in conclusion, I fully support this Bill to name the tennis courts at the Orville E. Kean Campus on St. Thomas at UVI after Dr. Fenella Cooper, a distinguished sports icon. Yet I urge this body to do more, and to set a different and higher standard for naming opportunities at the University. I look forward to discussing my remarks and suggestions with you and responding to your questions. I thank each one of you for the consistent and meaningful support you have provided to the University.