

BILL NO. 35-0195

Thirty-Fifth Legislature of the Virgin Islands

November 13, 2023

A Resolution honoring and commending Mr. Willard John for his many contributions to the youth and the culture of the Virgin Islands

PROPOSED BY: Senator Marise C. James

1 **WHEREAS**, Willard John was born in New York in 1951 to Alda Daniel John, a six-
2 generation St. Thomian who later migrated to New York, and Walter S. John was born in New
3 York with Berbudan Heritage; and

4 **WHEREAS** Willard was raised in St. Thomas and attended Saints Peter and Paul High
5 School in St. Thomas and graduated in 1970; and

6 **WHEREAS**, Willard attended Lincoln University in Pennsylvania and graduated with a
7 bachelor's degree in psychology in 1974. Returning home, he furthered his education by
8 earning a master's degree in education supervision from the then College of the Virgin Islands
9 (Now the University of the Virgin Islands); and

10 **WHEREAS**, Willard showing an interest in being a Moko Jumbie, trained with John Mc
11 Cleverty, Jr. in St. Thomas in 1974. In 1975, he participated in his first parade coming down
12 the road in St. Thomas Carnival as a Moko Jumbie; and

1 **WHEREAS**, in 1976, he started his education career with the Raphel Wheatley Skills
2 Center as a vocational counselor; and

3 **WHEREAS**, Willard held many positions in St. Thomas and St. Croix as a vocational
4 counselor, cultural education specialist, adult education coordinator, and skill center
5 coordinator. He has also been Assistant Principal and Principal at Elena Christian Junior High
6 School and Assistant Principal and Principal at Saint Croix Career and Technical Education
7 Center. He retired from government service as Principal of the Saint Croix Educational
8 Complex in October 2015; and

9 **WHEREAS**, in 1979, Willard moved to St. Croix and started performing in festivals,
10 parades, and other festive activities around St. Croix and the territory. However, he did not
11 stop there. In 1979, he performed at Superbowl XIII during the half-time show. Willard has
12 represented the Virgin Islands as a Master Moko Jumbie and Virgin Islands cultural
13 ambassador in West Africa, South America, Europe, over 20 states of the United States, and
14 many Caribbean islands. In 1990, Willard had the honor of representing the Virgin Islands and
15 our traditional Moko Jumbie art form by participating in the Smithsonian Festival of American
16 Folklife in Washington, D.C.; and

17 **WHEREAS**, Willard researched, wrote, and directed the documentary Mokolution: The
18 Evolution of the Moko Jumbie. He also wrote The Development of Quelbe Music in the Virgin
19 Islands and Crucian Fruits, all productions chronicling the development of culture in the Virgin
20 Islands; and

21 **WHEREAS**, Willard knew he needed to share his knowledge and love of Moko Jumbies
22 with the youth of St. Croix. He wanted them to understand that this is an honored tradition
23 passed down by generations of enslaved Africans who came to the Virgin Islands and the
24 Caribbean; and

1 **WHEREAS**, in 1993, Willard and Anna Thompson started the “Ricardo Richards School
2 Moko Jumbies,” which has transitioned over the past 30 years into the well-known Guardians
3 of Culture Moko Jumbies; and

4 **WHEREAS**, over the past 30 years, Willard has trained more than 350 young Virgin
5 Islanders to be traditional Moko Jumbies. Today, every Moko Jumbie in St. Croix has been
6 taught by Willard or by a Moko Jumbie taught by Willard and

7 **WHEREAS**, teaching Moko Jumbies to be professionals is also part of the training, and
8 the training of these professionals has resulted in many stunning performances at least once or
9 twice weekly in hotels, restaurants, and special events around the island; and

10 **WHEREAS**, Today, Willard is kept busy teaching the Guardians of Culture Moko
11 Jumbies and coordinating weekly cultural entertainment for hotels and other organizations.
12 Willard is the owner of Jumbie Productions Inc., a provider of Film Location Management,
13 Production Services, Event Management, Entertainment Booking, and Consulting; owner of
14 Dispute Resolution Services LLC, a provider of Mediation/Dispute Resolution, Organizational
15 and Workplace Mediation Training; and

16 **WHEREAS** Willard is a two-time past president of the Rotary Club of St. Croix MidIsle,
17 of which he has been a member for the past 34 years. He has been on the Board of Directors
18 of the St. Croix Foundation for Community Development for the past ten years, has been on
19 the Board of Directors of the Agriculture and Food Fair of the VI for 30 years, a member of
20 the Board of Directors of the Frederiksted Federal Credit Union for the past eight years, and is
21 a member of the Board of Governors of the VI Port Authority, serving his second three-year
22 term and is serving as the chair for the past 1.5 years; and

23 **WHEREAS**, Willard is a devoted father to his son and daughter. He is also a loving
24 husband to his wife Curliss Solomon-John, who is a valuable member of the Moko Jumbie

1 family and has designed and made every costume he and all the Moko Jumbies have worn for
2 the last 30 years; and

3 **WHEREAS**, the Guardians of Culture Moko Jumbies salute Willard John and live by
4 his motto, “The best way to preserve culture is to live it,” which Willard John lives every day;
5 Now Therefore,

6 ***Be it resolved by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands:***

7 **SECTION 1.** The Legislature of the Virgin Islands, on behalf of the people of the Virgin
8 Islands, honors and commends Mr. Willard John for his numerous contributions to the youth
9 and the culture of the Virgin Islands.

10 **SECTION 2.** The President of the Legislature or the President’s designee shall prepare
11 and present a perma plaque copy of this Resolution to Mr. Willard John at an appropriate
12 ceremony.

13 **BILL Summary**

14 Section 1 of the bill honors and commends Mr. Willard John for his service to the
15 community and his many contributions to the youth and the culture of the Virgin Islands.
16 Section 2 directs the President of the Legislature to present a perma plaque copy of the
17 Resolution to Mr. Willard John at an appropriate ceremony.

18 **BR23-0515/September 8, 2023/YLT/REVISED OCTOBER 31, 2023**