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## Rupert W. Ross, Jr

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Good morning,

Honorable Carla J. Joseph, Chair of the 35th Legislature of the United States Virgin Islands Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection, members of the legislature present, other testifiers, other individuals present, family and friends, I appear before this esteem body in support of Bill No. 35-0239, an Act honoring and commending Mrs. Claire Lorraine Brown Roker for her sixty years of service to the people of the Virgin Islands by naming the visitors center at the Ann E. Abramson Marine Facility in Frederiksted, St. Croix, in the Virgin Islands of the United States, "The Claire L. Roker Visitors Center".

Most of you may know me but not of me. I am Rupert W. Ross, Jr., a retired educator with thirty-three years of public service; beginning as a teacher, then a school administrator, then a district director for labor relations and contract management, then as the district superintendent of St. Croix and retiring after serving as the assistant commissioner for the Virgin Islands Department of Education. After a brief retirement, I had the honor and privilege of serving as the St. Croix Administrator for two years. I have also been involved in community service for over the past sixty years.

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Mrs. Roker earned her livelihood in the world of the hospitality and tourism industry. She was employed by Pam American World Airways for ten years, where she improved her exceptional customer service skills. With the departure of "Panama" in 1975, she was employed as a travel agent at the Farrelly's Travel Agency. In 1978, family members and friends encouraged her, and she opened Roker's Travel Agency. Four years later, she was employed as the Pavilion and Tour Manager at the Cruzan Rum Distillery at Estate Diamond in St. Croix.

During this period of employed, she also attended the then College of the Virgin Islands taking courses in business administration and accounting which prepared her well for her future challenges.

Over the years, Mrs Roker was also highly active politically. In 1987, she was appointed Assistant Director of Tourism. In 1991, she was appointed Director of Tourism and in August of 1994, she was promoted to Assistant Commissioner of Tourism. Prior to these appointments, she was a campaign helper for the late Lieutenant Governor Derek M. Hodge, who ran successfully to become the chair of the St. Croix District of the Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands in 1974. She also served as campaign manager for the late Senator and Attorney Albert A. Sheen in 1984.

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After her tenure in the executive branch of the Government of Virgin the Islands, Mrs. Roker passion for public service led her to serve as office manager in the office of the Former Delegate to Congress, Donna M. Christiansen. After a brief retirement, in 2006, she returned to the political arena as office manager for the Former Senator Ronald E. Russell, the minority leader of the 27th legislature and the senate president of the 29th. Still committed to make an impact on the future of her community, she successfully ran and because a delegate to the 5th Constitutional Convention of the Virgin Islands of the United States. She also held office as chair of the St. Croix District of the Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands.

If you think that is the scope of the last sixty years of her life on St. Croix, you are wrong. Mrs. Roker has dedicated most of her life giving back to the Virgin Islands community, especially St. Croix. She was the producer/director of the Hal Jackson's Virgin Islands Talented Teen Scholarship Pageant for forty (40) years. She highlighted the talents and expanded the horizons for over five hundred aspiring performing artists. She also produced and directed the Miss St. Croix Festival Queen competitions, including its 50th anniversary pageant, and the Miss America Most Outstanding Teen Virgin Islands competitions.

Mrs. Roker has either volunteered, been part of, or held leadership roles in many organizations. She is currently a member of Our Town Frederiksted, Rotary Club of St. Croix West, Relay for Life, Women's Coalition of St. Croix, St. Croix Chamber of Commerce, and the Frederiksted Economic Development Association. It is in this organization, FEDA, that we most closely associated. We worked together on community economic stimulating activities, such as Harbour Nights, monthly Sunset Jazz Concerts, Blue Jazz Fest, and other musical concerts to stimulate economic

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activity in Frederiksted. She is also currently Vice President of the Governing Board of the Virgin Islands Council on the Arts. Her work locally, regionally, and internationally has earned her numerous awards.

Therefore, it is fitting that the lady who has been called the Queen Mother of Pageants will join two other Queens of Frederiksted, Mrs. Eliza McBean and Mrs. Ann E.

Abramson, to remind us and the future generations of Virgin Islanders and its visitors of the significant role that women played in the revolution, evolution, and advancement of the quality of life of all Virgin Islanders.

Since I spent the past six decades working with Mrs. Roker, who dedicated her life to be of service to her community, I am humbled and honoured to appear before you to pay tribute to her lifelong achievements and to support the passage of Bill No. 35-0239, an act naming the welcoming center at the Ann E. Abramson Marine Facility the "Claire L. Roker Visitors Center". I trust that you will act favourably on Bill No. 35-0239

Thank you for this opportunity to address you on behalf of Mrs. Claire L. Roker.