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Testimony—Bill No. 35-0195 Willard John

To: 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands USA

From: Wallace Williams

With this opportunity, I would like to thank the 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands USA for inviting me to join all in honoring Willard John. We have been friends for over 45 years!

Willard and I met one day while we were on training runs on St. Croix's North Shore Road (now named Senator Sydney Lee Drive). He was running East from Cane Bay, I was running West from Salt River; we both reached the summit of the long climb to the top of the hill just west of estate Rust Op Twist at the same time. We stopped, introduced and from that day trained together and had successful performances in local long distance races in St. Thomas, St. Croix and Vieques, Puerto Rico including: The BUY THE CASE 15k in St. Thomas, THE MC DONALD'S HALF-MARATHON in St. Croix and St. Thomas and THE MARATHON MESU in Vieques to name a few. Willard was one of the top five long distance runners in the Virgin Islands! He was one of the early Virgin Islands Pace Runners and to this day volunteers in the organizing and hosting of its activities for example the recent 40th Annual The Women Race for the Women's Coalition of St. Croix..

Over the years our relationship grew. Willard was employed with the Virgin Islands Department of Education—He headed the Adult Education Skills Center in Estate Peters Rest. There the lives of ambitious adult learners were impacted by a curriculum taught by: Corine King (English and Writing Skills); Gerard Emanuel Virgin Islands History and Culture); Ronald Russell (Mathematics and Science) and Yours Truly (Library Skills and Life Coping Skills). Our paths routinely cross that of students who remind us of those times with a pleasant "thank you".

It was during the period that Willard was with the Cultural Education unit of the Dept. of Education when his program production capability emerged. While joining colleagues: Jewel Ross-Sage, Gerard Emanuel to develop a V.I. History Curriculum. It occurs as I write this that the location of the Cultural Education building was located across the street from the Caribbean Dance Company and where Curliss, Willard's future wife, was dance instructor. Together they would form a dynamic cultural entity that to this day is unsurpassed in quality and essence in the Virgin Islands. It was through collaboration between the public library and

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Cultural Ed. Staff that a seed was planted for *Clear de Road*, the Virgin Islands History text book. It was published by The Bureau of Libraries, Museums and Archeological Services authored Roger Hill and illustrated by St. Croix Artist Elroy Simmonds with Jewel Ross-Sage leading the development of the teacher's guide for the book.

One recalls Willard heading up an Adult Education Program at the Theodora Dunbavin School which enabled students to earn GED and other training/certification. While gaining the respect and reputation as an educator, he was appointed Principal of the Elena Christian Junior High School. Willard found that he was in demand as culture bearer as he perfected his skill as the Virgin Islands iconic Moko Jumbi. Also he was and continues be a community volunteer. Through collaboration with St. Croix Foundation for Community Development he help forge support of the corporate community for his school. He still holds the title President of the board of that organization. In addition, he took on the presidency of the Friends of the Public Library which saw numerous successful programs and projects take place during the post Hurricane Hugo period. A talented swimmer, Willard found that he possibly could be useful as a member of the Coast Guard Auxiliary.

In time Willard mastered the performing art of Moko; Jumbi, he has become the resident expert. For decades he has represented the Virgin Islands locally and abroad to include an appearance at the "Supper Bowl". He is the Founder/President of Guardians of Culture Moko Jumbis which functions as an academy for Moko Jumbis in the Territory and for decades has trained and produced hundreds of youths in effort to further establish the performing art and to insure its future. He produced "Mokolution ", a multi-media presentation designed to illustrate it.

One can help but wonder how Willard finds the time accomplish all that he does. He is an active member of Rotary Club of St. Croix Midisle having served as President. Until his retirement from the Department of Education he impacted generations of Virgin Islanders as he has served as Principal of The St. Croix Educational Complex High School and the St. Croix Career and Technical Education Center in 2015. He lends his talents historical and cultural to the Department of Tourism in multiple capacities; for example, he produces and manages entertainment for cruise ship tourists.

Retirement hasn't slowed Willard down. His production of "Mokolution serves as historical and cultural offering as well as entertainment for hotels and special occasions including parades, cruise ships, weddings and more.

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Since his retirement, Willard became a member of the Virgin Islands Port Authority and currently holds the position Chairman of the Board. *St. Croix Taxi Driver Customer Service Training Presented by Alcess Lewis Brown* is an excellent project he instituted in collaboration with The Royal Caribbean Group, Taxi Drivers and the VIPA Board. It is yet another example of the scope of the impact that Willard John has on the betterment of our Virgin Islands. He is one of top “productive citizens” of the Virgin Islands. He well deserves the honor you bestow on him today.

For a gallery of Willard John photos I have taken over the years
logon to: <http://dloc.com>
type wallacewilliams Willard in search window