

TESTIMONY
ON
BILL No. 35-0316

Honourable Carla J. Joseph, Chair Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs and Consumer Protection; sponsoring Senators: Senator Ray Fonseca, Senator Milton Potter, and Senator Angel Bolques, good morning.

Thank you for your invitation to testify on Bill No. 35-0316, honouring and commending Mrs. Juel Turnbull Rhymer Molloy for her years of service and contributions to the people of the Virgin Islands. Mrs. Molloy's achievements and accomplishments are well known to the community especially those whose lives she has touched and made a lasting impact.

My focus in this testimony is to share key aspects of my professional and personal relationship with this special lady and to justify how very deserving she is of this Honor.

Long before I worked with Mrs. Rhymer-Molloy, I had heard of her indisputable reputation as the Executive Director of the Community Action Agency. The word on the street was, "If you need help, go to the Barge, and ask for Mrs. Rhymer. Anything you need she will make sure you get it." As a result of her outstanding performance, Mrs. Turnbull-Rhymer, as she was known at that time had earned a favourable reputation with her federal partners not comparable to many other local agency officials in her field.

In 1987, when Alexander Farrelly took office as Governor of the Virgin Islands, he appointed Mrs. Juel Turnbull Rhymer-Molloy as Commissioner of the Department of Human Services as the Reorganization of the Government went into effect. This is where our professional journey began. As the business minded person she is, her first plan of action was to thoroughly review the Department's financial status. Her findings revealed many areas of concerns, one of which was the low salaries of professional staff compared to other Departments of the Government. She immediately took steps to increase staff salaries to acceptable levels based on qualifications and years of experience.

I recall the first series of meetings Mrs. T.R. Molloy had with the management and supervisory staff during which she shared her findings, goals, and expectations of the agency. Many of the managers felt intimidated by the new agency head and voiced their concern saying, “she come here to put us down and make us look bad.” Opinions and attitudes gradually changed as staff recognized that the intent of the new no-nonsense Commissioner was to improve the Department’s operation and ensure that everyone had access to the resources they needed to do their job.

One of Mrs. Molloy’s most outstanding accomplishments was the implementation of her project to repair and restructure the Knud Hansen Memorial Hospital building, creating a one-stop Human Services and Health Agency. The complex also accommodated the first Vending Stand Program for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Prior to this project, the Department’s programs were operating in separate locations incurring high rental cost. Relocating these programs to the Kund Hansen Complex resulted in significant savings to the Department and the Government.

Another task the new Commissioner faced when she came on board was to address the millions of dollars disallowed by the federal Government on the Commission on Aging. This meant hours of tedious work with staff going through vast amounts of documents and collaborating with the federal officials to justify that expenditures were appropriate and approvable. Again, she saved the local Government millions of dollars.

Every Manager in the Department of Human Services was aware that Commissioner Molloy would accept no excuse for federal dollars not being spent. Monthly financial reports were submitted on time for her review and if there was evidence that funds were not being utilized in a timely manner, the manager was barred from traveling. She required a well outlined plan with timelines showing how funds would be spent for services prior to the end of the fiscal year. Her record as a financial wizard speaks for itself. Mrs. Molloy continues to be regarded by the Federal Government as one of the most trustworthy leaders in the Virgin Islands as it relates to managing federal funds. Because of her ability in this area, she was given oversight responsibility of the Departments of Human Services, Health, and Education in her capacity as CEO during the Charles Turnbull Administration. Mrs. Molloy’s strong commitment to advocate for the needy and underserved grew out of her own humble beginnings. This is evident in

the many ways she assisted persons with their personal problems and facilitated struggling organizations:

- She intervened when retired Virgin Islanders lost their homes and could barely survive because they went without receiving payment from the Government Employees Retirement System for one or two years. She thought this was unconscionable and worked with the GERS to release payments so persons could resume a decent lifestyle,
- She advocated for elderly persons in the Sea View Nursing Home for many years when the facility experienced serious financial shortfalls, appealing to the Government and members of the Legislature to purchase the facility. This was after the owner invested millions of dollars from his personal funds to keep the Nursing Home in operation.
- She served as the Virgin Islands representative in the National Head Start Association to ensure that young children in the Territory continue to receive the services that will help them succeed in school. The Virgin Islands Head Start Program was the recipient of \$42 million with NO matching funds required making the expansion of the Program possible.

Mrs. Molloy, a dedicated community activist spent her entire career ministering to the needs of those living in poverty and often at great personal sacrifice. Her contributions to the community were not always appreciated by some but it never deterred her from living a life of service and doing what she believed was right.

The story of her life reminds me of the Biblical parable of the Talents found in the book of Matthew. She multiplied her God given talents to twice the amount she was given to benefit others.

I wholeheartedly approve of this bill to Honor Mrs. Molloy by renaming the Knud Hansen Complex as the Juel T.R Molloy Complex. It is long over-due.

Thank you.

Sedonie Halbert