

**TESTIMONY OF MARIA M. CABRET
ASSOCIATE JUSTICE, SUPREME COURT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS**

In Support of Bill No. 35-0286, an act honoring the Honorable Verne Antonio Hodge, Presiding Judge Emeritus of the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands

Good morning,

Honorable Senator Carla J. Joseph, Chairperson of the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection, Other Senators of the 35th Legislature, Testifiers, and other audience members.

My name is Maria M. Cabret and I am an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the Virgin Islands.

It is extremely rare that a judicial officer can testify in support of any legislative bill. This is one of those very rare occasions, and I am happy to appear and enthusiastically support Bill No. 35-0286, which seeks to honor and commend Presiding Judge Emeritus Verne Antonio Hodge for his years of dedicated service and for his vast and varied contributions to the people of the Virgin Islands.

Sometimes we refer to Presiding Judge Emeritus as “Judge Hodge”, but I point out that Judge Hodge was Presiding Judge throughout his entire judicial career—from 1976 when he was appointed by Governor Cyril E. King until he retired on October 31, 1999. During those 23 years he was an outstanding leader of the Territorial Court. He was the Presiding Judge when the R. H. Amphlett Leader

building on St. Croix was built and then dedicated in 1984, and he was the Presiding Judge when the Alexander A. Farrelly Justice Center was built and then dedicated in 1994; he created the Rising Stars Youth Steel Orchestra; he managed the Territorial Court's expansion from very limited civil jurisdiction to unlimited civil jurisdiction and to original jurisdiction in all criminal actions. During this same time, he also presided over thousands of cases, and wrote many, many, clear, concise and well-reasoned opinions, his passion for the law and brilliance being evident in every one of them. On occasion, he would also sit on the District Court bench by designation. And at every step of the way, he made absolutely certain that the Territorial Court and its judges were given and shown the respect they were warranted.

His achievements are too numerous to be discussed in one day, but I do want to shine a bright light on his love for this Territory and our people. That love is deep and constant. It is that love that always made him "look down de road," making sure that everything he did would benefit the Virgin Islands, not only now but in the future. And it is that love that made him the outstanding leader he was and is, and it is that love that makes him an exceptional jurist.

In 1993, after the Honorable Raymond L. Finch was appointed by President Bill Clinton to the District Court of the Virgin Islands, Presiding Judge Hodge designated me to succeed Judge Finch as the Administrative Judge for St. Croix. I

was humbled and honored that he selected me. As the administrative judge, I got to work very closely with Presiding Judge Hodge and my deep admiration for him grew with each passing day; I felt truly privileged to be under his tutelage and I will be forever grateful to him for his guidance and sage counsel.

Presiding Judge Hodge maintained close communication with not just the judges and administration, but with all, and I mean all, the employees of the Territorial Court, not only knowing most of them by their names, but knowing their families, and knowing when they were encountering difficulties. Presiding Judge Hodge showed them, by his actions, that he cared deeply about them. On St. Thomas and when he would visit St. Croix, he would always go to the clerk's office and say loudly, "Verne Hodge, here!" signaling to them that he was always available if they needed to see him about anything. He was a caring, compassionate leader and he demonstrated this on a daily basis. Needless to say, the employees deeply appreciated him for this caring concern.

And, without any equivocation, Presiding Judge Hodge worked harder than any judge or employee of the Court. He was often the first to enter the building and almost always the last to leave it. Just a few days before he retired, during one of our telephone calls, Judge Hodge's voice was so hoarse that I could barely understand what he was saying. He was hoarse because for days on end he had been sitting on

the bench, hearing small claims cases, from early morning to late at night. He wanted to clear his small claims calendar before he left. Every case was as important to him as it was to the litigants. And that is just one example of his deep love for the law and his dedication to service.

“Nothing is so complicated that is cannot be simplified by hard work.” is the mantra of the Rising Stars and those wise words the Rising Stars learned from Presiding Judge Hodge, who lived and lives, the meaning of that mantra every day. Presiding Judge Hodge continues to contribute even though he is retired, and even today, he sits on cases in the Supreme Court when other justices recuse themselves and he is designated.

I hope that when Presiding Judge Hodge’s name is placed on the St. Thomas Superior Court building, those who see it will be motivated to study his life and be inspired, as so very many judges and lawyers have been and continue to be inspired by his dedication, his integrity, his unwavering commitment to the Court, to the law, and to the people of the Virgin Islands. Without a doubt, Presiding Judge Emeritus Hodge is one of our brightest stars.

Thank you, Presiding Judge Hodge, and congratulations on this extremely well-deserved honor.

Again, Bill No. 35-0286 has my enthusiastic support. Thank you.