Good morning, Senator Kenneth Gittens, Chairman, members of the Committee on Homeland Security, Justic & Public Safety, members of the 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands, Central Staff, testifiers, and friends.

I am Stedmann Hodge, Jr., a St. Thomas Carnival Booth Owner since 2008, and participating in the Food Fair & Boat Races since 2019.

First, I would like to thank the Committee on Homeland Security, Justic & Public Safety, for allowing any concerns about the upcoming Virgin Islands Carnival Celebration on St. Thomas to submit questions and/or comments.

In keeping this testimony brief, I’ll share concerns that other St. Thomas Carnival Booth Owners may agree or disagree with.

They are as follows:

**Carnival Booth Owner Fee:**

The fee to participate in the St. Thomas Festival is $2,500 compared to St. Croix, which is $1,000. There is no equity in terms of the fee that is presented. The Division of Festivals is a Government Entity that is required to provide equity with all fees, no matter the jurisdiction.

**Festival Days**

The Division of Festivals have reduced the number of days that the Carnival Village is open. Prior to the Division of Festivals managing Carnival Events and Activities the Carnival Village it was open for 9 days when opening on a Friday Night and closing the following Saturday. Since, it have been very inconsistent with the days ranging from 6 days to 8 days. A good example are taxi drivers on St. Croix who are required to pay the same fees although St. Croix gets less visitors.

**Permits**

There is always challenges when it comes to the days the Carnival Booth Owners are to be present for inspection by our local agencies. A lot of logistics are involved and the Division of Festivals need to streamline their process and develop a written plan that outlines the procedures and incorporates their rules and regulations.

**Violations**

The Division of Festival does not have anyone designated to address compliance or a hearing process to address any violations. Additionally, the use of formal correspondences does not exist which can lead to liability issues for Division.

Over the many years the St. Thomas Festival which was previously known as St. Thomas Carnival has had its successes and failures. Through is all the Carnival Booth Owners love and enjoy what we do. It is an opportunity to preserve our culture, maintain our traditions and enjoy the beauty of the Virgin Islands and Its people.

It is my request that at an appropriate time a town hall can be held with all vendors that participate in Carnival Activities.

In closing, I wish to thank the Committee for affording me the opportunity to share my concerns with the hope that they may be addressed.

Thank you,

Stedmann Hodge, Jr.

Stedmann Hodge, Jr.

Carnival Booth Owner