

Testimony

Good morning, esteemed members of the committee. My name is Imani Evans, and I am the president of St. Croix Pride, Inc. - a non-profit organization dedicated to advocating for, educating, and celebrating the LGBTQ community of St. Croix and the entire Virgin Islands diaspora.

I humbly testify to you today in regard to the bill 35-0395, as well as the proposed amendment to VIC T16 §182.

I have had the pleasure of working within the LGBTQ community of St. Croix for my entire adult life as well as throughout the Caribbean. I have been privileged to know and love transgender and nonbinary people across the region and diaspora who have long dreamt of the day that they could safely return home to a Virgin Islands that sees and values them for who they are.

As we continue to strive for equality and dignity for all people, it is essential that our legal system reflects the identities of transgender individuals and protects their basic rights. For many transgender people, the ability to have accurate gender markers and legal names is not just a matter of convenience — it is a matter of safety, recognition, and well-being. Without accurate gender markers, transgender people are subject to the risk of violence, discrimination, and harassment. These challenges are not hypothetical—they are real, and they are deeply harmful to the mental and physical health of transgender people in the Virgin Islands.

In terms of the bill, there are changes needed in order to secure the highest level of protections and accessibility for transgender people in the Virgin Islands.

Firstly, the medical requirement must be removed completely. There are no known medical providers currently in the Virgin Islands who are able to provide gender-affirming care locally - whether that is surgery, hormone-replacement treatment, or psychological care and counseling. For many transgender people in the Virgin Islands, access to even routine check ups and treatment is limited because of the transphobia and discrimination that exists among medical care providers locally. It is also worth noting that many transgender people are unlikely to seek

medical care locally because of the risk of being outed as transgender outside of these medical facilities by the same providers who are meant to protect and care for them.

Secondly, the amendment that would allow a waiver of public notice is imperative to ensure the safety and health of the citizens that this bill would apply to. In addition to waiving public notice, I also urge that any and all records and proceedings regarding a gender marker change and subsequent name change be sealed. Our territory unfortunately has already been witness to tragic losses as a result of homophobic and transphobic hate crimes. For an applicant in this process to have any chance of living a safe and healthy life, a public notice absolutely could not occur.

For the transgender community in the Virgin Islands, this change would provide transgender individuals an opportunity to live with dignity, and without the burden of legal and societal barriers. In doing so, we also send a powerful message that we, as these Virgin Islands, value and respect the lived experiences of all of our citizens, regardless of their gender identity.

I urge the committee to support the implementation of these policies that allow for the legal recognition of transgender people's identities through gender marker and name changes. This step is not just about paperwork, it's about acknowledging the humanity of transgender individuals and ensuring they have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Imani Evans

President of St. Croix Pride, Inc.