

March 3, 2023

Good morning Honorable Senator Gittens and Senate members of the Committee on Homeland Security, Justice, and Public Safety, non-member senators of the 35th Legislature, and the listening and viewing audience. My name is Amaia Nicole Saret, and I am a member of the Philippine Community in St. Croix. I would like to provide testimony to express my support of bill number 35-0013, *An act amending Title 20 Virgin Islands Code, Part II, Chapter 35, relating to the issuance of operators' licenses and identification cards to allow applicants to obtain limited local purpose identification cards and operators' licenses without providing the certain federally required document.*

I would like to share my personal story as to why this bill will benefit to myself and other persons traveling into the territory on a US Student Visa. In August 2017, I moved to the territory and began my first year at University of the Virgin Islands (UVI). I started taking the VITRAN and taxis to get to classes, but it was quite difficult because there were no established schedules for either and the stops for the buses and taxis were far from my house and school. I did some research and spoke with the designated school official about the procedure for getting a license. According to the University of the Virgin Islands International Student Manual (page 13), all I needed to apply for a driver's license was my student ID and SEVIS I-20 papers. I visited the Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV) and UVI back and forth twice during that period, but I was never granted a driver's license due to a lack of necessary paperwork, including the social security card. I was able to get my social security from my job in mid-2020. The BMV first instructed me to provide my SSN and proof of residency (I used my job paystub as proof of residency), but due to my visa and their lack of knowledge of my case, they again refused to issue me a driver's license. Later that year, I was able to save enough money to purchase a vehicle for transportation, but because I didn't have a driver's license at the time, I had to register it in my mother's name in order to transfer ownership. I continued seeking advice from university staff members so I would know what to present and what questions to ask the BMV staff when they asked me for documents. I started the application process over again and asserted that I would need a driver's license in order to be able to actually drive the car I purchased. They eventually approved and issued me my driver's license in April 2021.

I will thank Senator Samuel Carrion for sponsoring this measure and Senator Gittens for allowing me the opportunity to testify on Bill Number 34-0013. I would like to urge the other committee members to vote in the affirmative to this bill that allows individuals to obtain a driver's license and Virgin Islands identification card without any federal documents. This is for our safety as well as the safety of all drivers on the road.

Sincerely,

Amaia Nicole Saret
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