Good afternoon, Honorable Senator Gittens, Chairman of the Committee on Homeland Security, Justice and Public Safety; members of the committee, and all other Senators present. Good afternoon to the listening and viewing public, and good afternoon to my lottery family and the greater community of the Virgin Islands. Present with me this afternoon is our Director of Security & Investigations, Ms. Ja’Keema Richards. Today is a day that I have been looking forward to for over four years. The Virgin Islands Lottery has a vision; our goal here today is to empower not only our enforcement team but our wider law enforcement community, and the only way to achieve this is through your support in passing the amendments contained in Bill No. 35-0179. I don’t come here with thoughts or dreams that we can solely or singularly make the full impact necessary on our Virgin Islands community, but with the assistance of our law enforcement partners and the supportive amendments to our enforcement laws, we can accomplish major successes. Please allow me to lay out this mission.

We currently live in a community where illegal gaming activity is at a cancerous level. The influence and proliferation of illegal gaming, weapons, human trafficking, and a host of other activities are at an all-time high and crippling our community. We must take our heads out of the sand and recognize if we don’t extinguish this cancer as much as humanly possible, not only do we continue to lose our moral fabric, but also our economic foundation here in the U.S. Virgin Islands. I’ve shared in previous testimony, before other committees of this august body, the amounts of dollars that bleed out of the U.S. Virgin Islands. Just imagine all the good that can come from maintaining and sustaining these revenues locally!

The genesis of Bill number 35-0179, a series of amendments to Title 14, chapter 61 of the Virgin Islands Code relating to gaming violations, and Title 32, chapter13, governing the V. I. Lottery, came after careful review amongst legal scholars inside and outside our community, law enforcement, community leaders, and the public as a whole. People are tired of the “illegal influence” that permeates our community.

The bill clarifies certain definitions in Virgin Islands criminal code to make it clear that the playing the “numbers game,” the sale of out-of-territory lottery tickets, and unauthorized sports betting are all illegal gambling.

The bill increases the penalties for illegal gambling and makes those penalties consistent regardless of the type of illegal gambling.  For example, previously the sale of illegal lottery tickets was only punishable by a $200 fine.  This bill increases the fine to $1,000 – the same as other types of illegal gambling – and increases the potential jail time to make it a felony.

The bill also increases the civil forfeiture and fines that are available to law enforcement.  The proceeds from these forfeitures and fines will go to the Department of Justice and Lottery to help fund increased enforcement of the Virgin Island’s gambling laws.

Senators, this is our collective opportunity to increase revenues in the territory by eradicating illegal activity. It is also our opportunity to send a clear message to these actors that we will not sit idly by and allow them to spread their venom. I truly believe this is our opportunity to keep our money local. We have made it our objective to introduce the same games as those currently being offered illegally but ours are legal and in some instances our price points are better. We will continue to educate our community on why legal gaming makes sense by embracing the concept of supporting your own and leaving other people thing alone!

I want to thank each of you present here today for giving us this opportunity to make a difference! We stand ready to answer your questions to ensure that we will get these amendments approved. Thank you.