

TESTIMONY OF LUTHER RENEE

ON BILL NO. 35-0013

**BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY, JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY
35TH LEGISLATURE OF THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN
ISLANDS**

MARCH 15, 2023

INTRODUCTION

GOOD MORNING, KENNETH L. GITTENS CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMITTEE HOMELAND SECURITY, JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY, HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY, JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY; SENATOR RAY FONSECA, ANGEL L. BOLQUEST JR., DWAYNE M. DEGRAFF SR., ALMA FRANCIS-HEYLIGER,, FRANKLIN D. JOHNSON, JAVAN E. JAMES, OTHER MEMBERS OF THE 35TH LEGISLATURE, INDIVIDUALS IN THE SENATE CHAMBERS, AND THOSE VIEWING AND LISTENING VIA TELEVISION OR THE INTERNET AND ON THE RADIO.

MY NAME IS LUTHER RENEE AND I AM PLEASED TO COME BEFORE YOU TODAY TO LEND MY SUPPORT TO BILL #35-0013 SPONSORED BY HONORABLE SAMUEL CARRION AND ANGLE BOLQUES JR., AND CO-SPONORED BY SENATOR MERVIN BLYDEN.

AS I UNDERSTAND THE BILL IT IS TO ALLOW THE BUREAU OF MOTOR VEHICLES TO PROVIDE A LIMITED PURPOSE IDENTIFICATION CARDS AND OPERATORS LICENSES TO APPLICANTS WHO CANNOT PROVIDE CERTAIN FEDERALLY REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION. THIS BILL HAS MERIT ON A NUMBER FRONTS.

1. I SEE THE BILL AS THE “*DACA*” OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS. *DACA* REFERS TO *DEFERRED ACTION FOR CHILDHOOD ARRIVALS*. *DACA* IS A POLICY THAT ALLOWS SOME INDIVIDUALS WITH UNLAWFUL PRESENCE IN THE UNITED STATES AFTER BEING BROUGHT TO THE COUNTRY AS CHILDREN, TO GET SOME RELIEF. THE PROGRAM DOES NOT GRANT ANYONE OFFICIAL LEGAL STATUS OR A PATHWAY TO CITIZENSHIP, BUT IT DOES ALLOW THEM TO APPLY FOR A DRIVER’S LICENSE. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT BILL NO. 35-0013

- THAT DRIVER’S LICENSE SO OBTAINED UNDER THIS BILL IS A LIMITED PURPOSE DOCUMENT**

- **THE APPLICANT MUST BE ABLE TO HAVE PROOF THAT HE HAS THE ABILITY TO DRIVE**
- **THE SAME DRIVERS TEST AND VISION TEST THAT ALL INDIVIDUALS MUST PASS WILL BE REQUIRED**
- **LICENSES MAY NOT CONTRADICT ANY FEDERAL LAW AND CANNOT BE USED TO TRAVEL OR VOTE.**

2. THE INDIVIDUALS THAT THE BILL ADDRESS ARE RESIDENTS WHO HAVE BEEN LIVING HERE FOR A VERY LONG TIME, SOME FOR DECADES. THEY WORK AND DRIVE IN THE TERRITORY. BUT THEY DO SO UNDER THE COVER OF DARKNESS. FROM A PUBLIC SAFETY STANDPOINT, I SEE THAT THE BILL HAS MERIT. IN THE EVENT OF AN ACCIDENT, THESE RESIDENTS TEND TO FLEE THE SCENE. WITH A LOCAL ID AND A DRIVER'S LICENSE THERE WILL NO LONGER BE THE NEED FOR THOSE PEOPLE TO RUN FOR SAFETY AND HIDE BECAUSE THEY DO NOT HAVE AN IDENTIFICATION CARD. THE VICTIMS OF SUCH A MISHAP MAY NOW HAVE RECOURSE BECAUSE THE PERSON WHO HAS CAUSED THE

ACCIDENT CAN NOW BE IDENTIFIED AND HELD ACCOUNTABLE. DRIVERS LICENSES FOR THE UNDOCUMENTED WILL ASSIS IN IMPROVING PUBLIC SAFETY BY REMOVING UNTRAINED AND UNSAFE DRIVERS FROM OUR ROADWAYS.

3. MY RESEARCH HAS REVEALED THAT HERE ARE PEOPLE LIVING IN THE VIRGIN ISLANDS FOR TWENTY (20) YEARS AND MORE WHO HAVE WORKED HERE BUT ARE UNABLE TO TRAVEL OR VISIT FAMILY AND FRIENDS WITHIN THE VIRGIN ISLANDS BECAUSE THEY ARE NOT ABLE TO PRODUCE AN IDENTIFICATION CARD.THESE PEOPLE ARE CAUGHT IN A TRAP UNABLE TO ENJOY THE FREEDOMS THAT OTHERS OF US ARE USED TO.

4. FROM A CLEARLY HUMANITARIAN PERSPECTIVE, I SEE THE MERITS OF THE BILL. SHOULD ANY OF THE UNDOCUMENTED PEOPLE BECOME GRAVELY ILL AND HAVE TO BE AIR LIFTED FOR NEEDED MEDICAL EMERGENCIES, THEIR CHANCES OF BEING SENT TO THE MAINLAND ARE SEVERELY REDUCED BECAUSE THEY DO NOT HAVE ANY IDENTIFICATION CARD TO MAKE THAT TRIP

POSSIBLE AND SO THEY MAY PERISH. WHILE SOME EMPLOYERS ARE WILLING TO VOUCH FOR THESE PEOPLE, FEAR OF BEING SINGLED OUT AS A LAW BREAKER PREVENTS THEM FROM DOING SO. THERE HAS BEEN MANY REPORTS OF ADULTS WHOSE LIVES HAVE BEEN IMPERILED BECAUSE THEY COULD NOT RECEIVE URGENTLY NEEDED MEDICAL CARE BECAUSE OF THE ABSENCE OF AN IDENTIFICATION CARD.

WE MUST NOT CONTINUE TO ALLOW THIS TO HAPPEN TO OUR FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS WHO SUFFER IN SILENCE AND HAVE SUFFERED FOR A VERY LONG TIME. WE MUST RECOGNIZE THE SUFFERINGS OF THESE PEOPLE WHO WORK IN OUR HOMES AND ON OUR HOMES WHILE THEY REMAIN TRAPPED IN THIS NO MAN'S LAND.