

RE: Nomination of Aaron Hutchins to the VI Territorial Park Board of Trustees

Testimony of Aaron Hutchins:

Good morning Honorable Senator Diane T. Capehart, other members of 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands Rules and Judiciary Committee, non-committee members and legislative staff present, and members of the viewing and listening public. I am Aaron Hutchins. I have been nominated by the Honorable Governor Albert Bryan, Jr. to the Virgin Islands Territorial Park Board of Trustees. I am very well suited for this roll and am anxious and eager to help advance the VI Territorial Park System.

I am a product of the Virgin Islands and have lived on both St. Croix and St. Thomas. I was born on St. Croix and began exploring as soon as I could crawl and, while I have significantly explored our islands, including off-shore keys, I continue to fall in love with many *new-to-me* nooks and crannies each year.

I consider myself both a waterman and a bushman as well as an entrepreneur and perpetual community servant. In the Virgin Islands, I've worked as a scientific diver as well as a trail builder, a technocrat, an advocate, an educator and even an expert witness on several occasions. I have decades of experience in outdoor recreation and natural resource management, private business, public agency, and non-profit organization leadership.

I am most at peace in nature and I love educating all ages about the nature and culture of our islands. I launched and co-own an outdoor tour company, which has provided over 16,000 fantastic guest experiences primarily on bicycles and trails to locals and visitors as well as targeted youth programs. Combined, our guests have pedaled and hiked over 200,000 miles on St. Croix.

Over my 25-year career, I have worked significantly for the VI Department of Planning and Natural Resources in various technical and leadership capacities, I have further directed The Nature Conservancy's Caribbean Program operations in the US Virgin Islands, the British Virgin Islands, and launched the Puerto Rico Program. I have also founded and continue to develop and operate multiple businesses across five locations in St. Croix and St. Thomas to include, Leatherback Brewing Company, Caribbean Crafted distribution and logistics company, and Island Life Adventures bike shop and tour company.

I attended the Good Hope School, Drexel University and Duke University. I have degrees in Ecology, Civil Engineering and Environmental Management. I am a huge fan of UVI and continue to interact with several of its numerous programs and have served as an Advisor to UVI's Masters of Marine and Environmental Science Program. I have also served on the Board for the Trust for Virgin Islands Lands and am a Past-President of the VI Cycling Federation and VI Cycling Team Manager. I co-founded and continue to perform volunteer leadership for the Virgin Islands Trail Alliance—which is a significant contemporary contributor to trails and parks on private and public lands.

The work I anticipate doing as a member of the Territorial Parks Board is an evolution of my professional contributions to our community and my life experience. I have been involved and working continuously in various ways towards the manifestation of the Territorial Park System along with many great people and organizations since my early career at DPNR and have successfully carried this effort with me spanning the public, non-profit and private sectors active in the Virgin Islands. While this is certainly something for *all-ah-we*, it's also much bigger—it's sowing the seeds and creating a durable framework for enhancing access, quality and stewardship of our shared and precious natural and cultural resources for generations to come.

It is an honor and a pleasure to be considered and vetted by this body for my role on the Virgin Islands Territorial Park Board of Trustees. This is doing what I love!
