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**Opening Statement
Nomination to the Virgin Islands Port Authority Board of Governors
35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands
Committee on Rules and Judiciary
April 11, 2022**

Good morning Honorable Senator Diane C. Capehart, Chairperson of the 35th Legislature's Committee on Rules and Judiciary; to all other distinguished Senators of the 35th Legislature and members of this Committee, to the Legislative staff, and to the listening and viewing audience.

I am Celestino A. White Sr., also known as Tony, Maltin, and Start Over - a native son who hails from Paul M. Pearson Gardens in St. Thomas. I am a graduate of the Charlotte Amalie High School Class of 1965, and I am particularly proud of my master's degree in Common Sense and Ph.D. in Street Sense from the School of Hard Knox.

I am a veteran and served four years with the United States Air Force assigned to the 377th Security Police Squadron and served in the Republic of Vietnam. Upon my honorable discharge in 1969, I joined the Virgin Islands Police Department and held all uniform ranks including the highest uniform position of Chief of Police. I left the Police Department with 23 years of service and was elected by the people of the St. Thomas/St. John District to serve as a Senator for 11 terms - the equivalent of 22 years. As a Senator, I was the Chairman of the Housing Committee for five terms, the Majority Leader for five terms, and advocated for initiatives that benefited the people of this territory. I have over 42

years of experience in government budget planning, strategic planning, policy-making, and governance.

As a member of the Port Authority's Board of Governors, I served primarily as a policy maker and provided advice and guidance to the Executive Director, who oversees the day-to-day operations.

The Port Authority has been one of the most active government agencies and has successfully executed an aggressive capital projects program to improve the territory's port infrastructure. Renovation of the Loredon Boynes Sr. Dock in Cruz Bay began in February. The funding for this project was provided by this body and will improve this essential port for thousands of residents and visitors the use the Boynes Dock daily traveling to and from St. John.

The restrooms at the Urman Fredericks Marine Terminal in Red Hook, St. Thomas also began last month. At the airport, the new, \$28.9 million Parking and Transportation at the Cyril E. King Airport (CEKA) is expected to be partially completed by late summer or early fall. This new parking center will significantly help to alleviate the lack of parking at the King Airport.

On St. Croix, both the Gordon A. Finch and the Wilfred "Bomba" Allick Port and Transshipment Center now have new cargo terminals and the old warehouses at Gallows Bay are scheduled to be removed as VIPA prepares to transform that port into a facility centered around passenger ferries and luxury mini-cruise vessels.

Repairs to the storm panels and the tender landing pier started last month at the Ann E. Abramson Marine Facility, the cruise port in Frederiksted, St. Croix. The Port Authority has been successful in its negotiations with Royal Caribbean Group to triple the number of cruise visitors to St. Croix. Executive Director Carlton Dowe and his staff, under guidance of the VIPA Board, continue efforts to enhance the tourism product in both districts.

The former VIPA Engineering building at the Henry E. Rohlsen Airport (HERA) in St. Croix is being renovated to relocate tenants from the damaged airport cargo facility. VIPA also completed the expansion of the passenger waiting lounge at the HERA Terminal in December 2021. The Authority is currently seeking to partner with a private company to continue the modernization of expansion of both HERA and CEKA. Our airports must be able to accommodate travelers and provide the amenities the traveling public has come to expect in modern times.

The lack of airlift between St. Thomas and St. Croix, as well as limited airline options to travel between the USVI and other islands in the Caribbean, has become a major issue affecting residents and our tourism industry. It is a challenge that the Board and the Executive Director have been aggressively addressing, including approving an airline incentive program for new airlifts.

The Board recently met with the new airline providing service between St. Thomas and the Dominican Republic

- SkyHigh Aviation. While we are excited about this new airlift, I asked the officials of SkyHigh Aviation to seriously consider adding St. Croix to their list of Caribbean destinations. I was pleased with their response that this is in their plans and that they hope to make this a reality in the very near future. I am also aware of current negotiations that we hope will provide a new service connecting St. Croix and St. Thomas.

Before I conclude my testimony, I would like to personally thank this body, the Legislature of the Virgin Islands, and the Bryan/Roach Administration for their support and appropriations totaling over \$10 million over the last two years. The success we are seeing at our ports is evidence of what can be accomplished when all branches of government work together.

I would also like to commend Executive Director Carlton Dowe for his exemplary leadership at the Authority, as well as his management team and the 365-plus employees at the Port Authority for their innovation and hard work over the last few challenging years.

Madame Chair, I conclude today by saying I humbly accept this re-nomination and hope to continue to serve the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands.
