



WILLARD A. JOHN

ST. CROIX, U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

**Re-Nomination to the Virgin Islands Port Authority Board of Governors
35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands
Committee on Rules and Judiciary
April 11, 2023**

A pleasant good morning Honorable Diane T. Capehart, Chairperson of the 35th Legislature's Committee on Rules and Judiciary; to the other distinguished members of the Committee, the Legislative staff, and the listening and viewing audience. My name is Willard A. John. I am a resident of St. Croix and a native of St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands. It is an honor to be nominated by the Honorable Governor Albert Bryan Jr. to be reappointed to the Virgin Islands Port Authority's Board of Governors as a representative of the beautiful island that I call home.

I am a retired educator who has served the Virgin Islands Department of Education for thirty-eight years as a Vocational Counselor, Cultural Education Specialist, Coordinator of the St. Croix Adult Education Center, Coordinator of St. Croix Skill Center, Assistant Principal and retired as Principal of the St. Croix Educational Complex High School. My community involvement includes thirty years as a member of the Rotary Club of St. Croix Mid-Isle and a member of the Board of Directors of the Frederiksted Federal Credit Union. I am also a board member of the St. Croix Foundation for Community Development.

As a culture bearer, I have represented the Virgin Islands throughout the world as an ambassador of USVI Culture. I am the founder and Artistic Director of the Guardians of Culture Moko Jumbies for the past thirty years. I am also the President of Jumbie Productions Inc. - a company that provides entertainment booking, event management, film location management, production, and consulting services. My past and current experience in education and local

culture is a unique and important asset to the Virgin Islands Port Authority Board.

I was elected last year and this year to serve as the Chairman of the VIPA Board of Governors. As Chair, I worked closely with Executive Director Carlton Dowe and the Royal Caribbean Group to improve our cruise and tourism product in both districts. I signed on behalf of the Board ratifying an addendum to the existing 10-year Piers Usage Agreement between VIPA and Royal Caribbean Group that was executed in June 2016. The revised agreement includes an increase in the rate of the per passenger port fees paid to berth at the cruise ports on St. Thomas and St. Croix. There are 72 scheduled cruise calls to St. Croix this season, and a projected growth of 180% in cruise visitor arrivals in comparison to the 50,000 passengers that visited St. Croix in 2019.

I am involved on a regular basis in our port and tourism activities, and present at the Frederiksted Pier for about eighty percent of the cruise ship arrivals to observe the operations and the service provided for our guests.

I must emphasize that I am not there to micromanage operations. Executive Director Carlton Dowe and his staff run an efficient operation at the ports across the territory. Rather, I use my on-site observations to formulate policies that may correct any deficiencies observed that may help improve the visitor experience. One deficiency that I have noted is in the taxi and tour operations on St. Croix. While this is not directly under the purview of the Port Authority, it does significantly impact our tourism product. Consequently, I am working with the Royal Caribbean Group to establish a training academy for taxi drivers in St. Croix. Drivers will receive training in U.S. Virgin Islands history, culture, and customer service. This endeavor is funded by a \$10,000 contribution from Royal Caribbean Group and will help coach our local drivers to become experts in their fields and provide an accurate and more pleasant tour experience for their customers.

Under the leadership of Executive Director Dowe, the Virgin Islands Port Authority has started and completed a myriad of port infrastructure

improvement projects. The cruise port in Frederiksted is currently undergoing repairs that will improve the appearance and safety of the dock. On February 7, 2023, VIPA's contractor started the reconstruction of the South Tender Pier Landing used by tour operators, divers, and other small vessels. I would like to thank Governor Albert Bryan Jr. and his administration for the \$2.05 million appropriated to repair the Tender Landing Pier. The storm panels that protect the pier are also being replaced, made possible via a \$400,000 appropriation provided by the Legislature.

VIPA expects to complete the paving of the Gordon A. Finch Molasses Pier Marine Terminal by September 2023. This new cargo facility features five bays – all of which have tenant commitments to occupy. The paving was initially removed from the project as a cost-saving measure. However, this body has funded the paving in the amount of \$679,250. Once completed, this will provide a safer driving surface for the cargo trucks and other vehicles that will use the facility. On behalf of the Board, I thank this body for the resources to complete this project.

VIPA has also completed the construction of a new cargo terminal at the Wilfred "Bomba" Allick Port and Transshipment Center – also known as the Containerport. This new, 42,000-square-foot terminal replaces an old warehouse that was destroyed in the storms in 2017. The terminal has ten bays and the VIPA Property Management Department has confirmed that seven of the bays already have commitment letters from tenants. VIPA will open this facility within the next 30 to 60 days once a certificate of occupancy is received.

Air service between St. Croix and St. Thomas has become a major concern, affecting government, business, and pleasure travel in the territory. I am pleased to report that the Port Authority's Board is addressing this matter. If I am reappointed to the Board, I will continue to work with Director Dowe and his staff to bring new airlift and some relief to the residents of St. Croix who have been plagued with the unavailability of flights to St. Thomas and other Caribbean islands. Executive Director Dowe expects to have good news to report on this front soon.

The Authority is excited about the new airlift between St. Thomas and Santo Domingo provided by SkyHigh Aviation Dominicana that started March 27. Cape Air has also started a new air service connecting St. Thomas and Nevis.

VIPA is also actively engaged in soliciting a private entity to partner with the Port Authority to modernize and expand both the Cyril E. King Airport in St. Thomas and the Henry E. Rohlsen Airport in St. Croix. This partnership will provide a financial means to fund the expansion of both terminals to include amenities such as jet bridges and new concession spaces, passenger luxury lounges, and other modern amenities.

VIPA is also improving the ports on St. John and St. Thomas. One of the major port projects on St. John is the renovation of the Loredon L. Boynes Sr. Dock in Cruz Bay – the primary port of entry to the island and one of the busiest ports in the USVI. VIPA is also actively working on the design for a fisherman’s facility on St. John and a community park at Enighed Pond. These projects were all funded through appropriations from this body.

Madame Chair, this concludes my testimony. I appreciate the opportunity to serve the people of this territory and enthusiastically look forward to returning to the Port Authority’s Board to continue our work to improve the territory’s port infrastructure, and formulate policies that will ensure that the U.S. Virgin Islands remains one of the most popular destinations in the world.
