

Good morning Honorable Chairperson Senator Diane T. Capehart, and all other Committee members of the 35<sup>th</sup> Legislature of the Virgin Islands Committee on Rules & Judiciary; non-committee members and legislative staff present, and members of the viewing and listening public. I am Anna Wallace Francis Nominee to the Virgin Islands Territorial Park Board of Trustees for the District of St. Thomas.

I begin by giving thanks to our Creator – to God- for inspiring and working through each of us to accomplish a greater plan to protect and preserve the Virgin Islands’ distinctive, natural resources. Special thanks goes to the Honorable Governor Albert Bryan Jr, I am honored by him nominating me for this position and especially for implementing a dream that many Virgin Islanders have had for generations. The Establishment of the Division of Territorial Parks and Protected Areas within the Department of Planning and Natural Resources to establish and maintain a Territorial Parks System will benefit us now and for future generations. To quote from Act No. 8609, Bill # 34-0267, “(3 -‘a) *The Government of the Virgin Islands declares its intent to ensure that the unique habitats and ecosystems and cultural and historical resources including, underwater archeological resources of the Virgin Islands are not entirely destroyed by development pressures and are preserved, protected, maintained and used for the long-term benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.*”

As a generational Virgin Islander many of my family members have contributed to the development of an enhanced VI. My grandfather, Maximillian William Wallace, was a member of the Working People’s Committee with Rothschild Francis. Aunt Luella Wallace Daniel, one of the founding members of the ICM party, worked tirelessly with the Free Beach Movement. My mother Mrs. Julia Wallace, adopted the VI as her home and worked hard as VI Director of Nutrition Services to improve nutrition and health services. She advocated for home gardens, the use of local foods, and was instrumental in bringing WICK services to the VI. My father, Viggo Wallace worked tirelessly to create more recreational opportunities in the VI. His dream was partly fulfilled by the building of the Long Bay public tennis courts and swimming pool and he was instrumental in introducing Little League baseball in St. Thomas. He was well known for teaching swimming and having summer camps to introduce the youth to our environmental heritage.

Strengthened by the history of my ancestors, and following in the footsteps of my mentors, Lesmore Emmanuel, Helen Gjessing and Attorney Edith Bornn, whose family contributions to the VI are well known, will be a challenge. Thus, Attorney’s Bornn’s trust and faith in my ability to continue to learn, grow, improve and contribute my life’s diverse experiences to this endeavor is heartwarming. We are at a cross roads where we must take a stand. United in diversity, this is the period of time when we must join diverse forces to overcome many challenges, and make hard decisions. To quote Basil C. Ottley Jr. “ The communal emptiness brought forth by the absence of a clear Virgin Islands identity is so much more devastating than a hurricane, terrorist attack, pestilence, or financial crisis because the lack of an identity denies us the strength of a muscle bound Virgin Islands spirit. Money is not the thing that

brings a people back from the destruction of a natural or man-made enemy. It is that communal muscle bound spirit (call it nationalism or patriotism if you want) that enables a people to get up, to pull their resources together, and to go to battle against what may seem to be the impossible.” (United in Pride and Hope, 2004) The priority of the development of our own Virgin Islands Territorial Park, which protects historical lands, environmental sensitive lands, ecological climate saving rain forests and marine habitats can help build Virgin Islands purpose, identity and pride.

Today we face hard challenges. Such as finalizing a Land and Water Use Plan; controlling the growth of the National Park Service due to limited land space on St. John; educating our community about our complete history of struggles & success, and ensuring that our community health and food security is improved. All these issues are intertwined with a Territorial Park System. The struggles the VI faces are not unlike the struggles of the United States in 1916 when President Roosevelt expanded the lands under public protection. There has always been a struggle to balance development with conservation. With the crisis of Climate Change, extreme drought, and food security we must think of nature as being an essential part of successful cities. Besides the value of trees/forests to provide shade and oxygen, they are essential in absorbing storm water runoff, protecting against mudslides and filtering out toxins. Research indicates that the presence of green foliage increases attention spans and decreases stress levels, thereby may reduce crime. Trees/ forests improve air quality, which can reduce asthma, bronchitis and diminished lung function. Forest and park walking trails provide more biodiversity of plant and animal species. Parks create a relaxing place to exercise, but also can be of economic value through Eco and Cultural tourism.

My experiences with working in the National Park and teaching in the classroom vs in nature have demonstrated the successes of engaging people in the natural environment. The need for our population to engage in new learning methods, and career training are unlimited as we embrace a Territorial Park System promoting diverse educational fields and skills needed to successfully maintain them. I would be privileged to work with the other individuals and departments who are already advocating for the protection and preservation our natural resources.

It is a pleasure to see that we are now embracing the philosophy that; “We have inherited our environment from our ancestors, and it is now our responsibility to preserve it for future generations.” To work with and be able to continue the dream of many Virgin Islanders by being a member of the Territorial Park Trust Board would be a privilege. I thank the Committee for considering my nomination, and hearing my testimony. I thank my family for all we do together.

Respectfully,

*Anna OWA Francis*

**Anna Wallace Francis**

“What a country chooses to save  
Is what a country chooses to say about itself”  
Molie Beattie, former Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service