

**TESTIMONY OF DION PARSON
ON BILL NO 35-0411
BEFORE THE 35TH LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS**

Good day honorary members of the 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands, and the listening and viewing audience. I am Dion Parson, and I am honored to have been invited to testify on Bill No. 35-0411, a bill to honor Ms. Georgia Francis. I am a professional musician, a percussionist, an educator, a mentor and I am currently serving as the Chair of the Communication and Performing Arts Department at the University of the Virgin Islands.

I was born and raised on the beautiful island of St. Thomas Virgin Islands, where I attended Jane E. Tuitt Elementary School, Dober Elementary School, Wayne Aspinal Jr. High School and Charlotte Amalie High School.

It was at the latter educational institution that I had the distinctive pleasure of meeting Ms. Georgia Francis during the 1984-1985 school year. Ms. Francis entered my life as the new incoming band director, and I had the distinctive privilege of being the Vice President of the Concert Band and the President of the Jazz Band and the Section Leader for the Percussion Section at that time.

Ms. Francis and I immediately develop a level of mutual respect and admiration for each other. I would say she became my Musical Mother, and has remained in that role to me up to today.

As a young man in high school, I was so focused on music, becoming a musician and a music educator and I felt that Ms. Francis always knew that about me and made every effort to create a pathway for me to excel, even beyond the classroom.

Our band rehearsals were fun, informative and very very intense. There were a lot of musical business to be taken care of and Ms. Francis definitely took care of her business as the band director. She led the bands with a commanding voice and equally with her knowledge of music, which reflected her own solid foundation in music education.

I must say, at that time, being young and impressionable, I was impressed to see a female band director who played multiple instruments very well and had a command of all the musical subjects that she taught. Ms. Francis played the clarinet and other woodwind instruments, a number of brass instruments, the guitar and the bass. As a matter of fact, she was so versatile on multiple instruments, that I didn't know for many years that her main instruments were the bassoon and the tuba. I was so impressed with her skill set of having command of all those instruments, that I worked very hard to become as good as Ms. Francis. She defiantly made an impact on me.

Ms. Francis has several amazing qualities as an educator. First, she is dedicated to being the best she could be, and her bands reflected her commitment to excellence. She always had the best Concert Bands, the best Marching Band and the best Jazz Ensembles for High Schools in the Virgin Islands. Her ensembles were first call for every official government event, ceremony and/or reception. She even played occasionally at hotel receptions for special events.

Second, as the director of these amazing ensembles, Ms. Francis made it a point to know all her students and their parents personally. She was personally vested in each student. She would challenge her students to be the best and always do the right thing. She did not hesitate to contact a parent if a student missed class, got into trouble or just needed a good wake up call. Her relationship with the parents influenced the foundation for the successful Band Boosters Club, which served as a support for her band programs. The Band Boosters Club assisted Ms. Francis in fund raising activities like food sales, bake sales and raffles.

Third, Ms. Francis created one of the most successful fundraising event that became her staple fundraiser. I am talking about her lunch time Johnny Cakes sales. Even after I graduated from High School in 1985, I would return home and visit the CAHS bandroom and spend time with Ms. Francis and her students, but I actually came back for the Johnny Cakes.

This was a very industrious activity that Ms. Francis created, because it allowed her to create a revenue stream to assist her band program. As we all know, money doesn't always flow in the direction that is needed, when it is needed and she created an avenue to allow her band programs to flourish because she could create a revenue stream to help music program, her students and her school.

I remember teaching summer band with Ms. Francis back in 1987 and we would have late rehearsals of extra rehearsals and Ms. Francis would cook patés and johnny cakes for everyone. Yes, she fed us with knowledge and then she fed us with food!

Fourth, Ms. Francis has a unique ability to identify the needs of her students and set them on a path of success. As we know, not everyone will become a professional musician. However, Ms. Francis could immediately identify the students that had that special gift that would allow them to excel musically. Her goal was to connect those students with performing musicians that could assist them on a professional level to get the best out of the students. Consequently, she would raise funds and send those student to summer camps like Interlochen and Berklee School of Music to expand their musical horizons. Ms. Francis also assisted students with the purchase of personal instruments, through donations, fund raising and gifts.

Lastly, I feel that the best quality as a human being is just being a friend, or in my case a musical mother. There were many occasions when I would call Ms. Francis just to check in, when in lived in New York City. We would talk about a number of subjects and Ms. Francis would listen to my stories and professional challenges and graciously give me advise. Occasionally, she would inform me of the students that were developing themselves musically and I would find ways to assist and help to help guide them.

Even after retiring from the Public School System, as a music educator, Ms. Francis was called back into the education platform to start a music program at

Antilles School. I was happy to assist her once again, as I would visit her quite frequently to talk with the students and give workshops and mini concerts.

After leaving Antilles Scholl, she transitioned to All Saints School, where she currently teaches on the elementary school. In addition to her teaching role at All Saints School, Ms. Francis has served as a Professor at UVI teaching the guitar for several years. Both Ms. Francis and I share the distinct honor of being recognized by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands in 2014 as part of the Virgin Islands Finest Musicians Initiative.

In conclusion, I must say that it is truly an honor for me to be here today to testify to behalf of my musical mother, Ms. Georgia Francis. Her commitment to music education, our Virgin Islands culture, her students, her family and the community of the Virgin Islands is evident in her years of service as an educator. Ms. Francis did all that she did because of her love and passion for music and the young musicians of the Virgin Islands. We can never repay her for her services to this community. I know that I am a better musician and human being because of her influence in my life.

I wholeheartedly support this recognition of a woman who has given above and beyond to this community. I also wish to thank her family for allowing us to share her for so many years. I also thank this legislature for this well deserving honor. It is truly my pleasure to be here today and stand in support of this measure. Thank you and I am available to handle any questions you may have.