

1 Greetings Honorable Senator Diane T. Capehart, Chairperson of the Committee on Rules and
2 Judiciary, Committee Members, Non-Committee Members, and the Listening and Viewing
3 Audience:

4 My name is Dionne R. Donadelle, and it is with great honor that I present testimony before this
5 body today in support of Bill No. 35-0411. This bill proposes renaming a portion of Rumer Drive,
6 beginning at Mandela Circle and continuing to the base of Dorothy “Dotsy” Lockhart-Elskoe
7 Drive, to “Georgia Francis Drive.” I am here to offer context and justification for this recognition,
8 drawing from my personal experiences spanning my journey from a young girl to a mature woman.

9 To many, she is known as “G-Fran” or Ms. Francis, but to me, she began simply as “Nennie
10 Georgia.” It is often stated that when selecting godparents for your children, one should choose
11 individuals who are trustworthy, deeply invested in the child’s well-being, and capable of fostering
12 their faith, growth, and development. They should be present throughout the child’s life journey
13 and beyond. With this standard in mind, I publicly thank Lillian Garfield for choosing such
14 exceptional godparents for me.

15 “Nennie Georgia” has been one of the best godparents one could ask for. As a young girl attending
16 Leonard Dober Elementary School, I began private lessons under her guidance in the third grade.
17 Every Saturday, I would go to the Herman A. Wallace Music Suite to watch her teach students of
18 various ages and instruments. When determining my instrument of choice, I confidently chose the
19 trumpet. When she asked why, I replied, “I want to be heard, and I want to show the boys at my
20 school that girls can play the trumpet just as well, if not better.” She laughed and said, “Okay, but
21 you must commit to your craft.” At nine years old, I didn’t fully understand what “craft” meant,
22 but I was eager to play the trumpet. She explained that daily practice for at least 15 minutes was
23 essential. It seemed simple at first, but little did I know the challenges ahead.

24 As I progressed to Addelita Cancryn Junior High School, I continued taking private lessons while
25 participating in the school band under the direction of Mr. Arthur Williams and the late Mr. Juan
26 Harrigan. Despite my hard work, I often felt unheard, particularly when not assigned to play the
27 first parts in band. When I voiced my frustrations, “Nennie Georgia” patiently explained that
28 directors assign roles based on the overall sound and balance of the band. Although I didn’t fully
29 grasp this at the time, I persevered and was selected to join the Virgin Islands Marching 100—an
30 initiative spearheaded by my nennie.

31 The Virgin Islands Marching 100 demanded significant commitment. Long hours of practice
32 during the week and weekends became routine. This initiative brought together students from all
33 three islands, spanning grades 7 through 12, for combined rehearsals, performances, and
34 competitions. Ms. Francis managed every aspect of this monumental endeavor, including
35 organizing uniforms, chartering flights, arranging accommodations and transportation,
36 coordinating meals, and planning activities. This was no small feat and required immense patience,
37 resilience, and determination.

38 It was at one of the many rehearsals that I received my first ball out and remember going home
39 and telling my mother that I am no longer calling her Nennie Georgia, it will just be Ms. Francis.

40 For those that participated in this venture along with the many other trips that Ms. Francis took her
41 band students on can attest to it being an awesome feeling. It was tough, but amazing all at the
42 same time. One of the highlights of my experience with the Marching 100 was performing at the
43 inauguration of President William J. Clinton. Despite the challenges—including marching in
44 freezing weather behind horse manure—we accomplished our goals with pride. Beyond the
45 parade, we competed against other schools and performed exceptionally well. This success was a
46 testament to the dedication and leadership of Ms. Francis and the collaboration of the other high
47 band directors from the territory, including Mr. Stanford Joines, Mr. Levi Farrell, Mr. Joseph
48 Crawford and many more.

49 As teaching is both a condition and an accompaniment of disciplining, that previous ball out that
50 I spoke about, was just the beginning of many more. But I was finally here – a ninth grader at the
51 Charlotte Amalie High School, and of course I was in the band. And even though I played with
52 the VI Marching 100, do you know I still had to audition to get in, like seriously, did I not prove
53 myself worthy?!?

54 This goes to the professionalism and understanding that not just because you were there does that
55 mean you can be here. It is a privilege to be a part of the CAHS Marching Hawks and you will
56 earn it all. And here I was thinking I did already, from holding the banner for numerous parades
57 when I was too young to be a part, to attending band jams way before my time, and just enduring
58 the ball outs, my rights should have been solidified.

59 It was that summer that I got my first job teaching at the Encore Summer Band Camp. This was
60 the start of something great within me even if I didn't realize it yet. Ms. Francis truly taught all
61 year round. The encore summer band camp became a signature camp for enrichment in music and
62 discipline.

63 In school memorizing the numerous marches and/or other genres of music, taking those grueling
64 playing test in front of everyone, trying to offer explanations as to why you weren't prepared for
65 the test or challenge using words like I "thought" in which she will quickly respond with "Tart"
66 the only "tart" in here will be Coconut, Guava or Pineapple. In those moments I think I speak for
67 most when I say you wanted to answer right back but you also knew your place, and just had to
68 laugh, buckle down and do your work. Or when she stopped you in your tracks with "you see my
69 thing is" or right now this is not a dialogue this is a monologue. Ms. Francis truly has a unique
70 teaching style.

71 Her influence extended to international stages, including performances and competitions in
72 Washington, D.C., Florida, Louisiana, California, Canada, London, and Argentina. In 2009, as the
73 director of the Virgin Islands Marching Sharks, we attended the inauguration of President Barack
74 Obama. Although we were not selected to participate in the parade, we competed and performed
75 admirably.

76 By this time, I had transitioned from student to educator, serving as the band director at Ivanna
77 Eudora Kean High School. While it was not my initial career plan—I aspired to be a physical
78 therapist—it became clear that music education was my calling, because my foundation was
79 clearly laid by Ms. Francis. Who to this day remains a mentor and inspiration, shaping my
80 approach to teaching and leadership.

81 Together, we launched the "Rock City Classic" Battle of the Bands, fostering healthy competition
82 and camaraderie among students. Although I cannot claim to have officially outperformed her I
83 am proud of the legacy we built together.

84 Currently, I am the Territorial Director of Music Education & Programs within the Virgin Islands
85 Department of Education, a position I took after 11 years at IEKHS with the blessing of my mentor
86 and godmother Ms. Georgia Francis.

87 Ms. Francis has undoubtedly within this great profession of teaching has sparked so many lives to
88 be productive citizens of our community and communities around the world.

89 She has the ability to maintain an engaging classroom (inside and outside), create value in real-
90 world learning, exchanges of best practices and a lifelong love of learning and teaching. Her motto
91 “You Discipline Those You Love” is a testament to her commitment with over 40 years of
92 teaching.

93 Ms. Georgia Francis is not only a musician and educator but also a cultural bearer, a humanitarian,
94 and a proud Virgin Islander. Her accomplishments are too numerous to list, but her integrity,
95 discipline, and dedication remain evident in all she does. Beyond her professional achievements,
96 she is also known for her culinary skills, particularly her “Lope hand” with Johnny cakes, pates,
97 and fried chicken.

98 In closing, I extend my deepest gratitude to this body for recognizing the immense contributions
99 of Ms. Georgia Francis. Renaming this portion of Rumer Drive in her honor is a fitting tribute to
100 a woman who has profoundly impacted the Virgin Islands community and beyond.

101 Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this bill and to celebrate the legacy of my
102 “Nennie Georgia.”