

**STATEMENT BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON RULES AND JUDICIARY**

**35<sup>TH</sup> LEGISLATURE OF THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS**

**MAY ADAMS CORNWALL, COASTAL ZONE MANAGEMENT COMMISSION NOMINEE**

**JANUARY 25, 2024**

Good afternoon Honorable Senator and Chairwoman Diane T. Capehart, members of the 35<sup>th</sup> Legislature of the Virgin Islands Rules and Judiciary Committee, non-committee members present, the viewing and listening public, and my family and friends. My name is May Adams Cornwall and I am at once honored and humbled to be nominated by the Honorable Governor Albert Bryan Jr. to serve as a member of the Coastal Zone Management (CZM) Commission, specifically, the St. Croix CZM Committee. I have reviewed the mission and goals of the CZM Commission and I am confident that I am qualified to accept this nomination.

For those of you who know me, I hope you will agree that my formal education and my public service experience have prepared me professionally to effectively deliver on my duties and responsibilities as a member of the St. Croix Coastal Zone Management Committee, should I be confirmed. Notwithstanding, as a refresher and for the benefit of those who do not know me, I would like to spend a few minutes introducing myself....

*My education.* I attended Juanita Gardine Elementary, Elena Christian Junior High, and St. Croix Central High School. While I excelled in all subjects, my favorites were math and science. Upon graduation from high school, I was motivated to follow in the large footsteps of my brother, Roy E. Adams, architectural engineer, former Director of Planning Office, and former Commissioner of the Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR). I also received a scholarship from the Society of Women Engineers, which taken together led to my decision to study engineering. I went on to earn a Bachelor of Engineering in Chemical Engineering from the City University of New York and a Master of Science in Chemical Engineering from Howard University.

*My public service career.* In 1987, I returned home and served in several capacities in the Government of the Virgin Islands for over 25 years. Those roles included District Engineer, Director of Environmental Services, and Chief Engineer for the Virgin Islands Department of

Public Works (DPW); Water Superintendent, Research and Grants Administrator, and Director of Water, Alternative Energy, and Grants for the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority (VIWAPA); and Executive Director of the Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority (VIWMA).

At DPW and, subsequently, VIWMA, I successfully led the negotiations of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) consent decrees and commissioned several major wastewater capital projects to comply with those federal consent decrees. These projects included the Mangrove Lagoon and Pedrito L. Francois Wastewater Treatment Facilities on St. Thomas, the Cruz Bay Wastewater Treatment Facility on St. John, and the Harold A. Thompson Wastewater Treatment Facility on St. Croix. All of these facilities achieved compliance with their respective major CZM permits and Territorial Discharge Pollutant Elimination System (TPDES) permits.

As DPW Chief Engineer, I was also responsible for the management, operations, and maintenance of public roads, bridges, culverts, stormwater control systems, public buildings, public transportation, and cemeteries. In this capacity, I also chaired the Quarterly Utility Accommodations meetings collaborating with public and private sector utility partners to strategically plan, leverage funding, and minimize the socioeconomic and environmental impacts of our interconnected infrastructure projects.

At WAPA, as the St. Croix Water Distribution Superintendent, my Team was responsible for the daily operations and maintenance of the potable water distribution system, including sampling and testing the water to ensure compliance with the Safe Drinking Water Act. Additionally, working together with my engineering colleagues, we successfully developed a project priority list and implemented a 5-year capital improvement plan, which included the design and construction of water line projects in La Grande Princess, Glynn and Calquohoun, Whim and Campo Rico, and Richmond Pump Station to Recovery Hill Tank, among others.

As the Director of Water, Alternative Energy, and Grants, I also worked with WAPA engineers on the groundbreaking research and development of the first interconnection agreement and the launch of the initial net metering program, accompanied by an unprecedented energy audit service for WAPA customers to assess and manage their energy usage to be more efficient and reduce energy consumption and costs.

In 2005, the Board of Directors of the Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority hired me as the first Executive Director of the newly formed autonomous agency. In this capacity, I directed the management of all human capital and financial resources allocated for the territory's wastewater and solid waste operations, maintenance, and capital improvement programs, which were transferred from the Department of Public Works. At this time, all three landfills were non-compliant, lacked operating permits, and had not been closed, upgraded, or replaced as required by federal law. More disconcerting, landfill fires, methane gas emissions, stormwater runoff, and leachate were adversely impacting adjacent communities in Bovoni/Nadir, Susannaberg, Enfield Green, and West End; Henry E. Rohlsen airport operations; and the quality of surface water, groundwater, and coastal resources in Fish Gut, Mangrove Lagoon, and Krause Lagoon.

In response to these eminent public health and safety threats, a comprehensive integrated solid waste management plan was developed; new landfill management, operations and closure service contracts were executed; and (again) EPA consent decrees were negotiated. Operations and maintenance costs and capital funding were justifiably increased and solid waste tipping fees were proposed. Major solid waste capital projects were commissioned, including the Bovoni Landfill Gas-to Energy Facilities, the Susannaberg Transfer Station and Landfill Closure, the St. Croix Transfer Station, and the national award-winning (Solid Waste Association of North America) Peter's Rest Convenience Center on St. Croix.

Lastly, in 2012, in accordance with the comprehensive integrated solid waste management plan, contracts for two waste-to-energy projects for St. Croix and St. Thomas were successfully negotiated and executed in close collaboration with the VI Water and Power Authority. Unfortunately, the desired and expected outcomes of these proposed projects – (1) increased waste diversion for recycling/reuse, (2) extended landfill life and closure plans, and (3) waste conversion to alternative energy – would not be realized.

After retiring from the Government of the Virgin Islands, I continued my public service career at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as a Senior Environmental Specialist, Environmental Manager, Environmental and Historic Preservation (EHP) Lane Manager; and I am currently the Public Assistance (PA) EHP Coordinator at FEMA Headquarters in Washington, DC. In this role, I coordinate the integration of EHP laws, regulations, and policies into the PA grant program design and delivery, policies, standard operating procedures, guidance documents, and training programs. Currently, I am also participating in the FEMA focus group on the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) alignment with other federal agencies and in the Office of Environmental Planning and Historic Preservation (OEHP) working group on the implementation of the Federal Flood Risk Management Standard. Working remotely at home on St. Croix has blessed me with the presence of my family and friends and the ability to serve my community.

*My community service.* I am no stranger to community service and have volunteered as a member, board member, president, vice president, and/or secretary for many of our local community and nonprofit organizations, such as Parent Teacher Student Associations (Lew Muckle Elementary School, Elena Christian Junior High School, Seventh Day Adventist School, and St. Croix Educational Complex High School), Boys and Girls Club of the Virgin Islands, Parents Against Violence, Association for Children for Enforcement of Support, Inc, Virgin Islands Resources Conservation and Development Council, Inc., Virgin Island Farmers' Cooperative, LLC, Friends of the East End Marine Park, St. Croix Hiking Association, Caribbean Museum Center for the Arts, Caribbean Community Theater, Society of Virgin Islands Historians, Caribbean

Genealogy Library, and St. Croix Landmark Society. I am also currently a member of the St. Croix Working Group engaged in the development of the Virgin Islands Comprehensive Land and Water Use Plan. I am thankful for these many opportunities, past, present, and future, to serve my community and to make positive contributions.

As a genealogy hobbyist, I have always been deeply motivated to honor my 9<sup>th</sup> generation maternal (Beryl Baumann Adams) and 7<sup>th</sup> generation paternal (Rudolph Adams) Crucian roots. I am the proud mother of two children and grandmother of four granddaughters, all of whom reside on St. Croix. I hope and pray to continue to set a standard of excellence for them to follow and a legacy of cultural heritage for them to uphold. It is a true labor of love to serve my community when given the opportunity to invest my time and share my expertise in support of the advancement of our connected Virgin Islands community – all of us.

*Our connected Virgin Islands community.* As a connected Virgin Islands community, I believe we must continually refresh and reinvent our collective vision. With respect to the Comprehensive Land and Water Use Plan, each island's Working Group is developing the plan that best fits its respective island focused on its own unique natural resources and coastal attributes. Our collective vision calls for a more collaborative process to develop and implement strategies that complement our sister islands. One such strategy could engage all CZM Committee members to objectively review permit applications on all islands, e.g. territory-wide review of proposed projects, supported by the availability of integrated data and GIS technology. The value of our shared knowledge and experience would lead to a more consistent and unified territorial CZM permit process. Further, this strategy would not only develop and expand technical capacity and resources, but also, could address Committee membership shortfalls.

Innovative thinking could also generate more public interest in serving on the CZM Committees. One example would be to engage a cadre of our University of the Virgin Islands (UVI) students in related fields of marine science and environmental studies, through academic or work credit

programs, to effectively review projects as affiliate CZM Committee members for practical experience in their fields of study. This is a succession planning approach that could serve to identify and develop potential future candidates for the CZM Committees. Further, DPNR partnership with UVI could create and offer a CZM orientation and refresher course on the CZM governing statutes, rules, regulations, and policies for prospective new candidates and continuing CZM Committee members. In fact, this model could be successfully applied to other boards and commissions.

Another innovative approach would be to engage Virgin Islanders in our connected communities abroad. Our own homegrown, professionally trained, highly talented, and nationally recognized Virgin Islanders in the diaspora are an excellent source of qualified project planners, developers, architects, and engineers. A strategic plan to engage and sustain these partnerships through educational programs and professional service contracts would also create a network of qualified candidates as well as technical and legal experts and consultants for the CZM Commission.

Moreover, the CZM Commission could form alliances with governmental and non-governmental organizations with a nexus to share information, host annual summits, collaborate on projects, advance technology, support grant applications, and testify on relevant legislative measures. For example, the CZM Commission could engage organizations working to protect, preserve, and enhance coastal resources and critical habitats. One such alliance for the CZM Commission could potentially include St. Croix Environmental Association, St. Croix East End Marine Park, Environmental Association of St. Thomas/St. John, St. Thomas Fisherman's Association, Island Green Living Association, Island Resources Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, and World Ocean School. Together, this alliance connects technical expertise and potential financial resources to maximize synergies, leverage funding, and expand our capacity to successfully achieve sustainable outcomes.

*Our Wider Caribbean Community.* Indeed, for the better part of my career, I have participated and advocated for partnerships with our wider Caribbean community in the form of professional alliances that foster ideas and collaborative solutions for our overarching goal to manage and protect our shared coastal water resources. The interconnectivity of our shared natural and coastal resources is the most compelling factor to build regional alliances and to strengthen our capacity to meet the common challenges of climate change and to prepare, respond, recover, and mitigate losses and damages due to increasingly more intense natural disasters.

*Our future.* To be clear, watershed management planning is the cornerstone to protect, preserve, and enhance our coastal resources. Additionally, protecting the coastal reefs from land-based pollution and the effects of climate change is paramount to the resilience of our coastal resources. Any developer must be cognizant of the social, economic, and environmental benefits associated with sustainable and resilient natural and coastal resources.

Effectively, in small island communities, all major construction projects have the potential to impact our coastal and water resources during and after construction activities. To comply with and achieve the intent and expected outcomes of the Coastal Zone Management Act, the Comprehensive Land and Water Use Plan must recommend actions that establish a single tier permit system, eliminate spot zoning, reform the zoning variance process, analyze real data and assess environmental impacts, and increase capacity for enforcement and mitigation.

In addition to my review of the CZM governing documents, I consulted with the current St. Croix CZM Committee Chairwoman and the Director of the VI CZM Program at DPNR. As a result, I agree with their assessment and recommend a comprehensive review of the CZM governing documents, including statutes, regulations, policies, and procedures, in order to update and amend these documents, as needed, for consistency and to empower the CZM Staff and

Commission to achieve our collective mission and goals to protect, preserve, and enhance our coastal resources.

*My pledge.* If confirmed, I pledge to

- Utilize my technical and engineering knowledge, communication skills, work experience, and resources management expertise to comprehensively review proposed projects
- Exercise due diligence and integrity to assess, evaluate, and balance community and economic development needs with environmental and public health risks
- Apply permit conditions that avoid, minimize, and/or mitigate potential adverse effects and that increase the sustainability and build the resilience of our coastal resources
- Work closely, collaboratively and respectfully with the other CZM commissioners to achieve the very best outcomes we can for the people of the United States Virgin Islands

In closing, I wish to thank you for your time and consideration of my nomination to serve on the St. Croix Coastal Zone Management Committee. I remain available to answer any questions you may have at this time.