



October 28th, 2025

Good morning, Chairman Senator Angel Bolques, Jr., Vice-Chair Senator Carla Joseph, Senator Marvin Blyden, Senator Alma Francis-Heyliger, Senator Novelle Francis, Jr., Senator Franklin Johnson, and Senator Avery Lewis,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of My Brother's Workshop, or MBW — a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing hope, healing, and purpose to the young men and women of the Virgin Islands.

MBW was founded in 2007 in response to the rise in youth violence and the growing number of young people falling through the cracks. Since then, we have served over 1,700 youth and young adults, ages 16 to 24, through a holistic model that focuses on healing, education, mentorship, career training, and job placement.

Many of our participants come to us having experienced trauma, neglect, or systemic barriers that have impacted their emotional well-being. At MBW, we focus on healing just as much as skill-building.

Each trainee is paired with caring, consistent mentors who provide daily guidance and accountability. Our on-staff social worker and certified anger management instructor help participants address trauma, manage emotions, and develop conflict resolution and coping skills.

Education and career training serve as powerful tools for personal growth and recovery. When a young person learns a trade, earns a paycheck, or achieves a diploma, they rediscover confidence and a sense of purpose.

Our vocational training programs include:

- Carpentry and construction
- Heavy equipment operation
- Marine rebuild and repair
- CNC Machine Shop
- Sewing
- Culinary arts and customer service

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These programs not only teach valuable, marketable skills, but also foster teamwork, patience, and self-discipline—key elements of emotional resilience and long-term success. The results are inspiring.

At our recent graduation ceremony, seven students earned their high school diplomas, and seventeen earned certifications in CPR, First Aid, Career Readiness, Microsoft Office, Driver's Education, and MBW trade programs. To date, fifty-nine students have earned their diplomas through MBW's education program. Each of these milestones represents far more than academic success—they reflect healing, growth, and renewed hope.

Despite our success, funding remains our greatest challenge. Our USVI government general appropriations were recently reduced from \$100,000 per island to \$50,000 per island, which now represents only about six percent of our annual budget, which averages between \$1.7 and \$1.8 million. That represents a 50% decrease in general appropriations, despite MBW continuing to expand services and potentially increase capacity.

While MBW operates as a social enterprise—generating income through our café, bakery, workshop projects, and rentals—these funds alone cannot sustain the level of service required to meet the needs of our community. Additional support is essential, especially as we expand to our new Donoe Bypass campus, which will allow us to serve over 250 students each year with the completion of the first building, which is fully functional—more than double our current reach.

MBW's success is rooted in collaboration. We work hand-in-hand with:

- Schools, to identify and support students at risk of dropping out;
- Juvenile justice and law enforcement agencies, to provide alternatives to incarceration;
- Government partners, to align workforce development and education efforts; and
- Community organizations, to ensure wraparound support for our youth.

We know that when young people are given structure, guidance, and compassion, they rise to meet expectations. Federal studies show that programs like MBW can save communities two to five million dollars per individual over a lifetime by transforming potential costs, such as incarceration or dependency on social services, while turning youth into productive, tax-paying citizens.

To strengthen the impact of programs like MBW, we respectfully offer the following recommendations:

1. **Recognize workforce training as violence prevention** – investing in vocational and soft-skill development builds safer, more stable communities.
2. **Invest in community-based capacity building** – to strengthen the infrastructure of local organizations that are on the front lines of youth development.
3. **Increase government funding for proven intervention programs** – Sustainable appropriations allow programs like MBW to plan long-term, retain qualified staff, and expand outreach.

In closing, My Brother's Workshop is proud to be part of the solution for our territory's youth. We currently have 35 students enrolled between our Workshops and our Café/Industrial Kitchen,

and 16 working toward their high school diplomas within our operations on St Thomas and St Croix. Every day, we witness the incredible transformations that happen when young people are given opportunity, guidance, and belief in their potential.

Our trainees are not defined by their past—they are shaped by the opportunities they're given today. With continued support from this body, we can expand those opportunities and ensure that every young person in the Virgin Islands has the chance to build a brighter future.

Thank you for your time, your commitment, and your continued support of our youth and the mission of My Brother's Workshop. I welcome all questions and look forward to our continued collaboration.

Respectfully,



Chrystie Payne, Program + Development Director

My Brother's Workshop