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**Statement of Marsha Taylor, Vice President  
The Village – Virgin Islands Partners in Recovery (VIPIR)  
October 28, 2025**

Good day Honorable Angel L. Bolques, Jr., Chairman of the Committee of Culture Youth, Aging, Sports, and Parks, and all honorable members of the 36<sup>th</sup> Legislature, also to our listening and viewing audience. I am Marsha Taylor, Vice President of The Village – Virgin Islands Partners in Recovery (VIPIR), accompanied by Brandy Brookes, our Prevention Programs Coordinator. We are honored to appear before you today on behalf of The Village- VIPIR to testify on the critical issues of youth mental health, violence prevention, and public safety in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

For more than 35 years, our organization has been a steadfast provider of substance use and co-occurring disorder services for adults. Over the past five years, we have expanded our reach to include substance use prevention and intervention programs for youths across the territory. Today, we stand at a pivotal moment in our organization's growth, surpassing expectations as our programs continue to deliver essential, life-changing, transformative services to the youths of the Virgin Islands.

Our youth-focused services encompass a range of prevention, early intervention, outpatient counseling, mentorship and family programs: including Substance Use Intervention Services, and Trauma-Informed Care provided by the Adolescents in Recovery and Community Connections (ARCC) Program. School and Community-based Prevention Services include Behavioral Health Coaching, Life Skills and Resiliency Training provided by the Project Horizon program. Family and Community-based support provided by Strengthening Families program which builds upon core values of family dinners, discipline, communication and other factors in building a healthier family structure.

At The Village, we utilize a holistic, integrated care model rooted in our core value of **“Uplifting the Human Spirit.”** Our programs are guided by evidence-based practices and culturally responsive, trauma-informed care that emphasizes family engagement and collaboration. We continue to strengthen partnerships with schools and community agencies to create safe, trauma-sensitive environments for our youth.

Our services are offered on both **St. Croix** and **St. Thomas**; however, service delivery on St. Thomas remains limited due to funding disparities, including challenges related to staffing, transportation, and infrastructure, which hinder full accessibility to all our programs.

We are at a critical point, as the demand for youth focused services are in high demand, however with limited support, unstable funding streams, delays in government appropriations, limited grant flexibility, and limited sustainability for existing programs reduces our operational agility. Amidst

the many challenges, The Village has tirelessly upheld our vision to **“Uplifting the Human Spirit.”** It is imperative that you understand our challenges to fully empathize with the youths of our Virgin Islands and the goals of The Village of building stronger, perdurable youth support systems.

Nonetheless, we believe in a coordinated, community-driven approach. With this established, here are our recommendations:

1. Formalized partnerships through MOUs with our government agencies DOE, DOH, and DHS in integrating supported prevention and intervention services in schools.
2. Shared data and referral networks to improve continuity for high-risk youths.
3. Increased investment in existing programs in peer and youth mentorship models.

We stand at a pivotal moment for one of our territory’s most impactful youth initiatives, the ARCC program. Now in its final year of federal funding, ARCC has been a cornerstone in empowering young people across St. Croix and St. Thomas. To date, the program has served 332 youths, with a mandate to reach 400 by the end of its cycle on September 30, 2026. Based on current projections, ARCC is on track to exceed this goal, demonstrating both its effectiveness and the ongoing demand for its services. This is precisely the kind of programming that deserves our continued investment. As federal support comes to an end, it is imperative that we step in to ensure the stability and progression of our youth. Sustaining ARCC beyond its federal funding is not just a commitment to our young people; it is an investment in the future of the Virgin Islands.

We respectfully request the full support of our Virgin Islands government in championing legislations that prioritize early mental health, behavioral health and substance use prevention/intervention, and cross agency collaboration to ensure the core values of our youths are met.

We thank you for your time, partnership, continued commitment to public health, and the well-being of the youths in our community.

Ms. Brookes and I are prepared to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

*Marsha Taylor*  
Marsha Taylor