



DEPARTMENT OF SPORTS, PARKS & RECREATION
GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS OF THE UNITED STATES



OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

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Good day, Chairman Bolques, members of the Committee on Culture, Youth, Aging, Sports, and Parks, Committee members, Senators of the 36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands, fellow testifiers, and the listening and viewing audience.

My name is Renee' Hansen, Assistant Commissioner of the Department of Sports, Parks, and Recreation (DSPR). It is an honor to appear before you today on behalf of Commissioner Vincent Roberts, who is currently out of the Territory, to discuss long-term strategies to strengthen youth development and expand opportunities through recreation, sports, and the arts across the Virgin Islands.

Allow me to introduce members of our leadership team who are present today: Mr. Aseah Thomas, Youth Community Coordinator – St. John, Mr. Richard Clendinen, Youth Community Coordinator – St. Thomas, and Ms. Jamilah Henry, District Administrator for Sports and Recreation – St. Croix.

The department of Sports, Parks and Recreation's mission is grounded in empowerment through engagement — ensuring that every young Virgin Islander has access to safe spaces, structured activities, and mentorship that foster growth, leadership, and community pride.

I. Youth-Focused Programs and Recreational Initiatives

DSPR remains committed to developing well-rounded youth through diverse programs that promote fitness, creativity, and civic engagement. Our current youth-focused offerings include:

- **Summer Enrichment and Learn-to-Swim Programs** – Operating on all three islands, these programs blend sports fundamentals, water safety, arts, and life skills to promote confidence, health, and teamwork among youth ages 6–17.
- **Territorial Youth Sports Leagues** – DSPR organizes and supports leagues in **basketball, baseball, softball, volleyball, soccer, tennis, and track & field**, engaging hundreds of young athletes annually through friendly competition, discipline, and sportsmanship.
- **“I Believe I Fly” Boxing Program** – A mentorship-based program that uses boxing to teach discipline, resilience, and self-confidence.
- **After-School Recreation and Mentorship** – Our recreation centers provide safe, structured after-school environments for youth to participate in arts and crafts, table tennis, board games, and academic support.
- **Territorial Sports Academies and Clinics** – In partnership with local sports federations and volunteer coaches, DSPR provides clinics in basketball, soccer, and baseball/softball to develop athletic skills and leadership.

- **Athletic Accomplishments Beyond USVI Borders** - The USVI territorial RBI Baseball/ Softball program achieved unprecedented heights when the Junior Baseball all-stars made it to the regional semi-finals and the 13-18 Girls softball all- star team, not only won the regional tournament, but in doing so, ultimately reached the semifinals in the Nike RBI World Series Tournament.
- **Community Events** – Regular community activities such as **bingo nights, card tournaments, and movie nights** that foster social connection across generations.

Upcoming and Revitalized Programs:

- **Recreation-in-Motion** – A mobile outreach program bringing structured play, fitness, and arts activities to neighborhoods and schools that lack recreational access.
- **Walk Out Wednesdays & Fitness programs** – Weekly community wellness events that promote active lifestyles and intergenerational participation.
- **Summer Cultural Arts Series** – Integrating music, dance, and traditional arts to strengthen cultural pride and introduce youth to creative career pathways.

These initiatives are designed not only to entertain and engage, but to build **character, discipline, and community identity**.

II. Facilities and Programs Supporting Youth Development and Workforce Readiness

Our parks, fields, and recreation centers serve as the **foundation of youth engagement**. Beyond recreation, they are **learning environments** that cultivate leadership, teamwork, and vocational skills.

Through partnerships with the **Legislature, Department of Labor, and nonprofit organizations**, DSPR continues to expand **student internships and summer youth employment opportunities**. Participants gain hands-on experience in park maintenance, landscaping, recreation support, and event coordination, while also learning valuable life and workforce skills.

Our **Summer Employment/Internship Program** provides practical work experiences that promote responsibility and readiness for future employment.

Additionally, **planned initiatives** such as the **Youth Employment in Parks and Junior Recreation Leaders Programs** will help participants develop communication, leadership, and professional skills — preparing them for future careers in both the public and private sectors.

III. Challenges to Access and Inclusion

While DSPR continues to make progress, we face several ongoing challenges:

- **Aging Infrastructure:** DSPR continues to renovate and restore facilities through ongoing FEMA and federally funded projects. However, many playgrounds and recreation facilities still require modernization to meet current safety and accessibility standards.
- **Limited Staffing and Funding:** Program expansion is often limited by personnel shortages and financial constraints. Reductions in our **Tourism Revolving Fund** and **Rebuild Infrastructure (RBI)** program appropriations have further challenged our operational capacity.
- **Equitable Access:** Certain rural and remote communities — particularly on **St. John** and **western St. Croix** — still lack consistent access to programs and facilities.
- **Insufficient Gymnasiums:** DSPR currently lacks dedicated gymnasiums in both districts, restricting year-round indoor programming, youth sports development, and potential revenue generation.

Addressing these challenges will require **sustained capital investment, public-private partnerships, and coordinated interagency planning.**

IV. Partnerships and Community Collaboration

DSPR’s success in serving our youth depends heavily on collaboration. We continue to strengthen partnerships with:

- **Public and Private Schools** – Integrating sports, arts, and recreation programs into school curricula and extracurricular activities.
- **Community Nonprofits and Faith-Based Organizations** – Co-sponsoring youth leagues, mentorship programs, and wellness initiatives.
- **Local Sports Federations** – Including basketball, soccer, baseball, and track associations that help identify and develop young athletic talent.
- **Municipal Governments and Civic Clubs** – Collaborating on park rehabilitation projects and youth engagement initiatives such as **Adopt-a-Park** and **Police Athletic League (PAL)** programs.

These partnerships ensure DSPR’s efforts remain **community-driven, culturally rooted, and inclusive.**

V. Recommendations for Expanding Youth Access and Opportunity

To sustain and expand our department’s impact, DSPR respectfully recommends the following actions:

1. **Modernize Facilities** – Continue capital improvements to ensure recreation centers are safe, ADA-compliant, and equipped with modern amenities and technology.

2. **Expand Workforce Development Pathways** – Link recreation participation to certification and training in coaching, officiating, event management, and facility operations.
 3. **Invest in Cultural Arts Programming** – Support young artists, musicians, and performers, creating new avenues for expression and entrepreneurship.
 4. **Enhance Mobile and Pop-Up Programming** – Expand Recreation-in-Motion and similar initiatives to reach youth in remote or underserved areas.
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Conclusion

Chairman Bolques and members of the Committee, The Department of Sports, Parks, and Recreation stands firm in its belief that **recreation is not a luxury — it is a necessity** for healthy youth development and community well-being.

Through sports, arts, and cultural engagement, we are not only developing athletes and artists but shaping responsible, inspired citizens who will lead the Virgin Islands into the future.

We thank the Committee for its leadership and continued partnership in supporting youth opportunity, and we remain committed to building programs that **empower, uplift, and unite** our young people through recreation.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. The team welcomes your questions.