

**36<sup>TH</sup> LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS  
COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND  
AGRICULTURE**

**The Honorable Hubert L. Frederick, Chairman**

**Testimony on Bill No. 36-0285: “An Act amending Title 3, Virgin Islands Code, Chapter 19, to establish the Virgin Islands Hall of Fame Registry within the Department of Tourism”**

**Dionne Wells-Hedrington, Ed.D.**  
Commissioner of Education  
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THE VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF  
**EDUCATION**



Greetings to the Honorable Hubert L. Frederick, Chairperson of the Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture; other Committee members; other Senators present; and my fellow Virgin Islanders. On behalf of Dionne Wells-Hedrington, Ed.D., Commissioner of Education, I am Victor Somme III, Assistant Commissioner of Education, to present testimony on Bill No. 36-0285 – *“An act amending Title 3, Virgin Islands Code, Chapter 19, to establish the Virgin Islands Hall of Fame Registry within the Department of Tourism.”* Joining me today is Stephanie C. Brown, Director of the Virgin Islands Division of Cultural Education.

After collaboration with the Department of Tourism (hereinafter DoT), the Virgin Islands Department of Education (hereinafter VIDE/the Department) generally supports the proposed legislation and is aligned with the DOT on this bill, however, we respectfully recommend the following conditions:

1. Section 1, subsection 342 (a) of the bill calls for the Department of Tourism to *“establish and maintain a Virgin Islands Hall of Fame Registry (“Registry”) to recognize individuals whose lifetime achievements or distinguished service have made extraordinary and lasting contributions to the Virgin Islands.”* It is our clear understanding, based on discussions and emails with the Office of Senator Hubert L. Frederick that the intent of the bill is also to serve as a tourism marketing initiative. Discussion with the Department of Tourism revealed that they do not currently have the expertise nor resources (human, financial, etc.) to implement this initiative from an administrative perspective. While the Department of Education, through the Division of Virgin Islands Cultural Education (the Division), can support this effort through educational programming, curriculum connections, cultural interpretation, and public engagement, we do not believe the legislation contemplates Education serving as the primary administrative entity for the Registry. Given this, the VIDE respectfully suggest a hybrid approach as follows:
  - a. The Department of Tourism be solely responsible for advertising, promoting, and developing the Registry as a tourism product; and
  - b. Existing entities, such as the Cultural Bearers Council (the Council) within the Division of Cultural Education, be responsible for the selection process; and that the Division of Libraries, Archives



and Museums (DLAM) within the Department of Planning and Natural Resources be responsible for the requirements in Section 342 (b) (1) and (2) Administration.

Please note that the recommendation about the Cultural Bearers Council is not intended to suggest that the Council function as a statutory board or formal government entity or authority. Rather, the recommendation recognizes the value and expertise that already exists throughout the Territory. The purpose of including the Division of Virgin Islands Cultural Education in this discussion is not based solely upon educational responsibilities. The Division serves as one of the Government of the Virgin Islands' principal resources for Virgin Islands history, cultural heritage, historical interpretation, place-based learning, and cultural literacy. Through curriculum development, teacher support, cultural research, public programming, and community partnerships, the Division has developed expertise in documenting and interpreting the individuals, events, traditions, and contributions that have shaped the Virgin Islands. Moreover, the work of the Registry does not end when an individual is inducted into the Registry. Many inductees may eventually become subjects of classroom resources, teacher guides, student learning activities, public exhibitions, cultural programming, and historical interpretation initiatives. As such, the Division of Virgin Islands Cultural Education serves as a bridge between recognition and education, helping ensure that the stories and contributions of those honored are preserved not only in records, but also in academia and the public understanding.

2. With respect to Section 1, subsection 342 (c) Advisory Committee, the VIDE does not support the establishment of yet another advisory committee/board for the Registry selection process. As stated earlier, an existing entity, such as the Virgin Islands Cultural Heritage Institute (once fully staffed and functional under the Department of Tourism), the governing board of the Caribbean Cultural Heritage Center and Park at the University of the Virgin Islands, or the Virgin Islands Council on the Arts, can fulfill this obligation. If this august body determines that a Virgin Islands Hall of Fame Registry Advisory Committee must be established, the VIDE would firmly advocate for the inclusion of the University of the Virgin Islands.
3. With respect to Section 1, subsection 342 (d) Eligibility, the VIDE respectfully and strongly suggest that the selection criteria for individuals to be selected for the Registry be adopted from the process used in the publication of the “**Profiles of Outstanding Virgin Islanders**” by Mrs. Ruth Moolenaar,



a native Virgin Islands cultural icon, educator, author, historian, and activist. “**Profiles of Outstanding Virgin Islanders**” is a three-volume collection of biographies of more than 100 Virgin Islanders that made great contributions locally, nationally, and internationally. The criteria use by Mrs. Moolenaar, which can be refined/updated/improved, include the following:

- Individuals should be natural born Virgin Islanders or have lived most of their life in the Virgin Islands.
- Contributions of the individuals should be recognized and acknowledged by other scholars, institutions, and leaders on a local, (*regional*), national and/or international level.
- Contributions of the individuals must reflect economic, social, political, (*athletic*), or other significant changes.
- If the individuals are pioneers in a given field, the contributions should reflect visible lasting effects.
- Literary or other works of the individuals should exemplify proficiency, brilliance, and scholarship.
- Individuals must have given profusely of their intellectual, financial, or other assets to the Territory and its people, and/or to the place where they reside.
- The individual must have displayed leadership, courage, and the use of energies beyond the call of duty.
- Individuals should project a genuine interest in the Virgin Islands and its people.

4. In Section 1, subsection 342 (e) Nomination and Selection, the VIDE recommends that this process be administered by a third party, an existing cultural entity, as suggested above and that it be an annual occurrence where members of the selection panel debate and advocate for their choices. Further, we would strongly suggest that the method of soliciting nominations be varied to include all sectors (public, private, religious, etc.) and eliminate any possible age-based bias unintended or otherwise.
5. With respect to Section 2 (a), the funds designated are for initial set up of the registry; however, ongoing appropriation of funds or other included funding for honorariums, research or adequate stewardship of this endeavor will be necessary.



6. With respect to Section 3, considering the necessity of providing time for the nomination process, convening of meetings and all other necessary processes to not only complete this Registry but to make it an exemplary project, we respectfully suggest that the timeframe be extended from 30 days to 120 days after enactment.

In summary, the Department is in general support of this proposed legislation with changes in the implementation. The VIDE feels that in many respects, the success of the proposed Registry depends upon three (3) complementary functions:

- Tourism promotion that targets specific marketing niches and strategies, while sharing these stories with residents and visitors alike;
- Libraries, archivists, historians, and researchers working to preserve and document them; and
- Education helping to ensure that future generations understand their contributions to Virgin Islands greatness.

Utilizing existing expertise across these functions may strengthen the Registry while avoiding the creation of additional governmental structures. Thank you for the opportunity to share this testimony with you, your colleagues, and our fellow Virgin Islanders. We are prepared to answer any questions you may have.