

Testimony of the Virgin Islands Board of Education

Before the Committee on Education and Workforce Development regarding, Bill No. 36-0080, An Act amending title 17 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 5 mandating a daily morning exercise routine for students in all public schools in the Virgin Islands.

Good morning, Chairman and Senator Kurt A. Violet of the 36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands Committee on Education and Workforce Development, other esteemed members of the Committee, legislative staff, fellow stakeholders, and the listening and viewing audiences. I am the St. John At-Large Member, Abigail Hendricks-Cagan representing Dr. Kyza A. Callwood, Chairman of the Virgin Islands Board of Education, and our esteemed member, alongside Sandra Bess, Executive Director and Kimberly Gereau, Associate Executive Director who are in the chambers for additional support. I thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Bill No. 36-0080, An Act amending title 17 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 5 mandating a daily morning exercise routine for students in all public schools in the Virgin Islands.

The Virgin Islands Board of Education acknowledges the importance of physical activity in fostering students' overall health and well-being. We also commend the sponsor's dedication to promoting healthy lifestyles. However, while the goal of improving physical fitness is laudable, we must respectfully oppose this legislation as drafted.

First, it is essential to recognize that students are already engaging in physical activity during school hours. Physical Education (PE), JROTC, extracurricular sports, and recess provide ample opportunities for daily exercise. Students are already running around during recess and participating in structured activities; a mandated morning exercise routine is therefore unnecessary and redundant. Legislation that mandates these additional routine risks creating an undue burden on schools, teachers, and students without any meaningful improvement to overall health outcomes.

Our teachers are already tasked with an extensive set of responsibilities, including delivering high-quality instruction, managing classrooms, and supporting student social-emotional needs. This bill would impose additional administrative and supervisory duties on teachers, who do not need more mandates but should focus on instruction. To effectively implement a daily exercise routine, schools would require additional personnel, including more PE teachers and certified CPR professionals, to ensure student safety which is a requirement not addressed in the bill. Without these resources, the schools and staff would bear significant liability for student injuries during the mandated activities.

Implementing a daily morning exercise program across all schools raises significant logistical and safety concerns. Many schools lack adequate gymnasiums, outdoor spaces, or equipment for safe group exercise. Furthermore, not all students can participate in certain physical activities due to health conditions or disabilities. Without clear guidance and proper staffing, this bill exposes schools to potential liability and risk while doing little to enhance the physical education already provided through PE, JROTC, or sports.

Rather than mandating a one-size-fits-all routine, schools should retain flexibility to incorporate physical activity in ways that fit their unique schedules and existing programs. This

may include recess, PE class, or voluntary exercise programs allowing students to be active safely without disrupting instructional time.

A daily exercise mandate without dedicated funding is unrealistic. Schools would require investments in facilities, equipment, and staff to implement the program effectively. Absent sustainable funding, the initiative risks failure and places an unfair burden on educators and administrators. If the intent is to genuinely improve student health, resources should be allocated for expanding PE staff, providing CPR-certified personnel, and maintaining safe facilities.

Conclusion

While the Virgin Islands Board of Education fully supports the goal of promoting student health and physical fitness, this bill is not the proper legislative approach. Physical activity is already embedded in schools' schedules, and mandating additional exercises adds unnecessary complexity, liability, and workload without clear benefit.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Legislature to oppose this legislation. Instead, we recommend that funding and support be directed toward expanding PE programs, hiring certified staff, and reinforcing safe, structured opportunities for physical activity within the existing school day. By doing so, we can protect student health, empower teachers to focus on instruction, and enhance outcomes in a practical and sustainable manner.

Thank you for your time and consideration.