



TESTIMONY OF

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CHAIRWOMAN
DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS (DPVI)**

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS,
VETERANS AFFAIRS, AND CONSUMER PROTECTION
36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands**

REGARDING

**READINESS OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS
FOR THE 2026 DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY ELECTIONS**

DATE: January 23, 2026

LOCATION: Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall
St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands

Good morning, Honorable Avery Lewis, Chairman, and other Honorable Members of the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans' Affairs, and Consumer Protection, and other esteemed members of the 36th Legislature.

A very special good morning to those who work for the Government of the Virgin Islands and to those who are witnessing today's important committee meeting.

I am **Carol M. Burke**, and I serve as Chairwoman of the Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands. Chairman Lewis, thank you for the opportunity to provide an informational update on the Party's readiness for the **2026 Democratic Primary Elections scheduled for August 1, 2026**.

My testimony reflects the Party's current organizational posture and is grounded in a formally adopted governing document—the **2026 Primary Election and Certification Plan**—which has been submitted for the legislative record. Since May 2024, the DPVI has started the process of full compliance with Honorable Judge Robert Molloy's ruling in the *Republican Party of the Virgin Islands v. Election System of the Virgin Islands*. In assuming my position as chairwoman, I was well aware of the tremendous work that lay ahead of the Territorial Committee. The Territorial Committee is the policy-making arm of the Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands, and its Executive Committee is the respective officers. Before I proceed with my testimony, I must express my unwavering gratitude to the members for their commitment and support. I must also give special recognition to the Executive Committee - Vice Chair, Kevin Rodriguez, National Committeeman Dr. Gary Molloy, National Committee Woman Riise Richards, Treasurer Dr. Kyza Callwood, Secretary Chanice Jarvis, District Chairs Abigail Hendricks-Cagan (STJ), Barbara Petersen (STT), and Sandra Setorie (STX). Acting Executive Director Kiese Sam, Communications Director Emmett Hansen, Special Projects Coordinator Arah Lockart, and our volunteers.

CONSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY, JUDICIAL CLARITY, AND THE NECESSITY OF A DPVI ELECTION PLAN

The authority of the Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands to govern its own primary elections is not aspirational, discretionary, or informal. It is **constitutionally protected, judicially affirmed, and legally enforceable**.

In January 2024, Chief Judge **Robert A. Molloy** of the United States District Court for the District of the Virgin Islands issued a decisive ruling in *Republican Party of the Virgin Islands v. Election System of the Virgin Islands*. That decision reaffirmed a foundational principle of American election law: **the certification and qualification of political party candidates are**

internal party functions protected by the First Amendment and may not be overridden or substituted by a government agency.

This ruling did not create new authority. It clarified and restored authority that already existed under the Constitution but had, over time, been constrained by administrative practice rather than law.

For DPVI, Judge Molloy's ruling made one point unmistakably clear: **the Party itself bears primary responsibility for defining, administering, and enforcing its own candidate certification and primary election procedures.**

As a result, the development of a comprehensive **2026 Primary Election and Certification Plan** was not optional. It was a necessary act of constitutional compliance and responsible governance. **Failure by the Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands to adopt and enforce its own election and certification framework would have constituted an abdication of the very authority the federal court has affirmed belongs to the Party itself.**

The Plan, therefore, serves as the **practical implementation of Judge Molloy's ruling**, translating constitutional principle into operational reality.

STATUS AS A CHARTERED AFFILIATE OF THE DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL COMMITTEE

The Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands is a **chartered affiliate of the Democratic National Committee (DNC)** and is the sole officially recognized Democratic Party organization for the Territory.

This chartered status carries both responsibility and authority. DPVI is entrusted with administering Democratic primaries, certifying candidates, and ensuring that Party processes align with national standards of fairness, transparency, and accountability.

The 2026 Primary Election and Certification Plan reflects these national responsibilities while remaining fully consistent with territorial law.

FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION REGISTRATION AND INSTITUTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

In **June 2025**, the Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands became **registered with the Federal Election Commission (FEC)** for the first time.

This registration subjects the Party to federal reporting, disclosure, record-keeping, and compliance requirements and represents a significant milestone in the Party's institutional development.

The adoption of a formal election and certification plan supports these obligations by ensuring disciplined governance, transparency, and accountability in Party election administration.

STANDARDS IMPLEMENTED BY THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS AND THEIR PURPOSE

The adoption of formal election and certification standards serves a fundamental purpose: **to ensure that DPVI's constitutional authority is exercised in a consistent, transparent, neutral, and legally defensible manner.**

Standards are not barriers to participation. They are the mechanisms that preserve fairness, predictability, and integrity.

- **Eligibility & Good Standing** – Defines who may seek nomination
- **Endorsement Thresholds** – Demonstrates baseline Party support
- **Certification Authority** – Clarifies who certifies and how
- **Neutrality Rules** – Prevents bias and conflicts of interest
- **Transparency & Notice** – Ensures equal access and informed participation
- **Dispute Resolution** – Provides due process with finality
- **Record-Keeping** – Ensures accountability and compliance

National Context:

Across the United States and its territories, **every state and territorial Democratic Party operates under written election or delegate-selection plans that include these same categories of standards.**

Legal Foundation:

- First Amendment
- Federal court ruling (2024)
- National Democratic Party governance requirements
- Federal Election Commission compliance standards

In short, standards are not optional in modern election administration; they are the means by which constitutional authority, fairness, and public trust are sustained—and DPVI's Plan places the Party squarely within national best practice.

ALIGNMENT OF DPVI BYLAWS WITH THE ELECTION AND CERTIFICATION PLAN

In addition to adopting the 2026 Primary Election and Certification Plan, DPVI has **updated its Party bylaws to ensure full alignment with that Plan.**

Bylaws are the Party's highest internal governing authority. For an election and certification framework to be legitimate, enforceable, and credible, it must be anchored in bylaws that clearly authorize and support the standards being applied.

DPVI updated its bylaws to:

- Reflect the Party's constitutional authority over candidate certification
- Harmonize internal governance rules with the Election and Certification Plan
- Eliminate ambiguity or outdated provisions
- Ensure consistency across governance, election administration, and dispute resolution

Taken together, the updated bylaws and the 2026 Primary Election and Certification Plan ensure that DPVI's authority is not only constitutionally sound but internally coherent, transparent, and enforceable.

COORDINATION WITH THE SUPERVISOR OF ELECTIONS AND TIMELINE ALIGNMENT

While certification authority rests with the Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands, DPVI recognizes the importance of coordination with the Supervisor of Elections and the Election System of the Virgin Islands to ensure the orderly administration of the August 1, 2026 Democratic Primary Election.

DPVI will formally meet with the Supervisor of Elections to:

- Review the Election and Certification Plan
- Clarify any implementation or procedural concerns
- Confirm points of coordination between Party certification and ballot administration
- Ensure shared understanding of respective roles and responsibilities

DPVI also recognizes that the Supervisor of Elections establishes statutory and administrative timelines necessary for ballot preparation and election administration. Accordingly, while DPVI maintains its own internal certification calendar, **the Party's timelines will adapt as necessary**

to align with the official primary election schedule established by the Supervisor of Elections for August 1, 2026.

This coordination ensures that Party authority is exercised in a manner that is both constitutionally sound and administratively workable.

ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS

From an operational standpoint, DPVI is prepared.

The Election and Certification Plan establishes clear roles for certification, oversight, and dispute resolution, supported by published timelines, standardized filing requirements, and documented procedures. These systems are in place and function.

CONCLUSION

In closing, the Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands stands before this Committee not simply as an organization prepared for the August 1, 2026, Democratic Primary Election, but as a **Party in the process of renewal and rebuilding.**

This moment represents more than procedural readiness. It reflects a deliberate transformation toward a **modern Democratic Party**—one that understands its constitutional responsibilities, embraces transparency and accountability, and is committed to thoughtful governance in a rapidly evolving political environment.

Through the adoption of a comprehensive Election and Certification Plan, the alignment of our bylaws, first-time federal compliance obligations, and strengthened coordination with election administrators, DPVI has reaffirmed its core mission: **to responsibly vet candidates, articulate and advance positions on issues that matter to the people of the Virgin Islands, and ensure that those who seek to lead do so with credibility, integrity, and respect for democratic norms.**

This rebuilding effort recognizes that democracy requires more than elections alone. It requires institutions capable of navigating **local challenges and national dynamics**, adapting to new realities while remaining grounded in constitutional principles and community trust.

Chairman Lewis and members of this Committee, the Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands is positioning itself to meet that responsibility—not as a passive participant in the electoral process, but as a **strong, disciplined, and forward-looking political organization** capable of facilitating meaningful democratic participation. In doing so, the Party serves as a stabilizing force—

connecting voters, candidates, and governance to strengthen public confidence and democratic outcomes.

Ultimately, the work before us is about preserving and advancing the **promise of democracy in the Virgin Islands**—a promise rooted in fairness, accountability, and opportunity, and carried forward by institutions willing to evolve, lead, and serve with purpose.

Thank you. I am prepared to answer any questions.

Respectfully submitted,



Carol M. Burke

Chairwoman

Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands