

Testimony in Support of the Legislative Bill Honoring Adelbert Bert Bryan Presented by Nikki Thomas

Honorable Members of the Committee,

My name is Nikki Thomas, and I am here today in strong and proud support of the legislative bill introduced to honor my father, Adelbert Bert Bryan.

This is an amazing privilege for my dad. He came from a generation that produced members of the community that somehow leaned into being the first of many things – whether it's being the youngest person in VI history to both attain the rank and retire as a Police Captain, the first Virgin Islander to earn a black belt in Nisei Goju-Ryu Karate, or being a member of the first graduating class of Claude O Markoe School. His generation was comprised of the first of so many many goals and they worked hard every step of the way to get there.

Growing up, my dad was a strict provider who poured into ensuring his children had everything we needed to succeed. Raised on Queen Street in Frederiksted by his parents, Wilmot and Anesta Bryan, my dad's roots run deep in a place that holds immense meaning for our family. It warms my heart to pair Queen Street with my dad's legacy, though our memories of it span different generations.

While I never met my grandfather, I spent plenty of time on Queen Street with my grandmother Anesta – whom we lovingly called Mama. Even though she was blind, she cared for us and so many of my cousins. Queen Street was a special place for us: we played games, swept the dirt yard with coconut brooms, dipped drinking water out of a giant stainless steel pot that sat on the stove, walked quickly to the store on the back street to buy tomato sauce, onions, and other ingredients for my grandmother our meals, and ran through the house under a sweat while my grandmother listened to two different radios at once, while simultaneously calling out to us to address any mischief.

My dad's childhood memories of Queen Street were vastly different, yet just as vibrant. For him, Queen Street was the neighborhood meeting place for boxing, playing steel pan, baseball, marbles, and other games. He and his friends even sailed homemade boats in the gutter during heavy rainfall. As the only boy amongst 11 sisters, he developed a fierce independence, deep discipline, and a strong sense of family responsibility that shaped his character and leadership. He learned the true meaning of community by watching his mother bake bread for the young people of the neighborhood, and he learned how to sew by watching his mother and sisters—even using that talent to make shirts for himself and his friends. Every summer, he had to learn a trade, mastering plumbing, carpentry, masonry, and electricity.

All of this molded my dad with what I call a "Queen Street mentality"—a distinct brand of resilience, resourcefulness, and community-mindedness. It's a mindset forged by standing tall as a pillar for his family and neighborhood. As a young boy, my dad was already growing into a leader whose strength was coming from responsibility, resilience, and community.

That Queen Street mentality taught him—and by extension, taught me—that you don't wait for opportunities; you build them. It means you are self-reliant, independent, and entirely devoted to lifting up those around you.

As a Leo baby raised by two Leo parents who met on that very same Queen Street, I learned early on what it means to walk into a space and never let anyone make me feel like I didn't belong. Our upbringing emphasized the fundamental equality of all people and instilled in us the courage to resist intimidation and censorship.

My dad was a firm believer that we were to be leaders, not followers. We were to think for ourselves, know right from wrong, and not follow what everyone else was doing. He instilled a deep respect for

education and history, teaching us to honor others while maintaining the resolve to never be controlled. He didn't just tell us how to live; he gave us the tools—literally and figuratively. I still remember when he gave me my very first tool pan to use in my first apartment.

Beyond his own home, my dad was a tireless pillar for our entire community. During the summers, while my siblings and I attended the Police Athletic League (PAL) camp, I had no idea at the time that my dad played a critical role in helping Renholdt Rookie Jackson to bring Rookie's vision to reality. My dad helped Rookie to ensure the viability and success of PAL by providing a location, resources, and support, which included removing unnecessary obstacles that blocked the progress of the program. My dad helped with the construction of the camp, organized community activities, and played a key role in the implementation of the well-known skating on Strand Street events. His commitment to the youth of St. Croix ran deep: he shared his skills in craftsmanship by teaching students how to build local toys, scooters, and box carts, always emphasizing the importance of self-sufficiency and skill development. He also hosted educational field trips for school children, seamlessly blending his love for science, agriculture, and education. Furthermore, he dedicated his time and expertise to numerous community organizations, including Little League, the Boy Scouts of America, the Juvenile Task Force, and the Virgin Islands Olympic Shooting Team.

My dad deeply understood the importance of sharing information and paving a clear path for kids in the community to be successful. Because of this, he fearlessly challenged inequities in various spaces. He was instrumental in prompting the lawsuit addressing the extremely poor conditions of the facilities at Arthur Richards Jr. High School to ensure students had a safe and proper place to learn. He also fought for and won the passage of a landmark law mandating the instruction of Virgin Islands and Caribbean history at every grade level, cementing his lifelong devotion to preserving our cultural identity and uplifting our youth. This is a powerful reflection of his dedication to educational excellence and cultural heritage.

His teaching style was rooted in a hands-on philosophy: observe closely to learn, then step up and do it yourself. I remember having to climb up onto our house roof as a young girl to watch him work, so I could learn what he was doing and hand him his tools. But it went deeper than carpentry or roofing; he taught me how to anticipate his next steps. He told me to watch closely so I could reach for the tool he needed and have it ready before he even had to ask. That single lesson—learning how to think ahead and anticipate needs—is a skill I still rely on every single day in my personal life and in my professional career.

Who I am today is a direct reflection of the blueprint he provided to us—a profound framework of values that includes self-awareness, confidence, discipline, leadership, fairness, resourcefulness, dependability, diligence, accountability, service to others, unshakeable self-reliance, fearlessness, and grit.

Passing this bill is a fitting tribute to a remarkable man who dedicated his life to lifting up his family, empowering his children, and strengthening his community with the unmatched Queen Street mentality. He didn't want to just survive for himself. Instead, he wanted to provide shade and stability for everyone around him and in the community.

He gave us the tools to navigate the world with courage and dignity, and I can think of no higher honor than to see his legacy recognized in this way.

On behalf of my family, thank you for your time, your consideration, and your support of this bill.