

Testimony of John Harper in support of Bill #36-0281 honoring Hans Lawaetz
before the Legislature of the United States Virgin Islands

September 28, 2026

Good day Senators. Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding Hans Lawaetz.

I met Hans in 1985, shortly after I moved to St. Croix. Over the 41 years since then, I have had the opportunity to know and work with Hans in several different areas of community life. Looking back on those experiences, what strikes me most is the extraordinary breadth of his contributions to St. Croix and the Virgin Islands.

My first introduction to something that Hans helped create came through swimming.

I was a swimmer and, when I arrived on St. Croix, sought out opportunities to swim. I was amazed to find a 50-meter swimming pool at St. Croix Country Day School, now Good Hope Country Day School. I later learned that Hans had been instrumental in starting the St. Croix Dolphins and building that pool, which remains the envy of some other Caribbean islands.

But it was much more than a pool that Hans helped build. Hans created a swimming program that has provided generations of Virgin Islanders with opportunities to learn to swim and to compete at the highest levels of the sport. You may recall that the athletic career of Tim Duncan began as a member of the St. Croix Dolphins.

I was very impressed by the quality of the program. The Dolphins had coaches with international experience who were doing innovative work in swimming training. Years later, another Dolphins coach, Kevin Tyrrell, who led the Virgin Islands swim team at the 2008 Beijing Olympics is today the head men's swimming coach at Harvard University.

I mention those facts not because Hans was responsible for the accomplishments of all of the people who came through the program, but because it illustrates the caliber of the institution he helped establish here on St. Croix and the opportunities that grew from his vision.

A few years later, I encountered Hans in a different capacity.

In the late 1980s, I was elected President of the Virgin Islands Cycling Federation. Hans was then Secretary General of the VIOC, and later became its President.

I watched Hans work tirelessly to find the resources necessary to send Virgin Islands athletes to the Central American and Caribbean Games, the Pan American Games and to the Olympic Games.

For a small territory, participating at that level is not easy! It takes money, organization, persistence and people willing to do an enormous amount of work behind the scenes. Hans did that work for decades.

Later still, I came to know Hans professionally as the insurance broker for his businesses: Annaly Farms, Inc., which operated the meat market, and Annaly Farms Senepol, Inc., which owned the family's world-famous Senepol herd.

Working with Hans in that capacity was always interesting and occasionally challenging.

One experience in particular has stayed with me. We insured a shipment of Senepol cattle going to Venezuela. I remember standing there watching locally raised cattle being loaded onto a converted Boeing 727 for the flight to Venezuela.

That made an impression on me.

Through experiences like that, I began to appreciate just how well-known Hans was in the international Senepol community. The Senepol is, of course, a breed developed here on St. Croix, uniquely suited to our climate—heat tolerant, drought tolerant and productive. Hans devoted much of his life to improving and promoting the breed, and Annaly Farms Senepol cattle and their genetics ultimately went to breeders in the United States and to many countries around the world.

Working with the family businesses also gave me some appreciation for the less glamorous side of agriculture on St. Croix.

Running a livestock operation here is difficult. One recurring problem involved automobiles knocking down fences, often late at night. Once a fence was down, cattle could escape onto the road, creating danger to the animals and motorists and significant expense for the farm.

I saw Hans deal with problems like this repeatedly. What impressed me was his persistence. He didn't simply complain about a problem. He kept looking for ways to solve it.

Hans' concern for agriculture naturally extended to another area in which Hans devoted decades of his life: soil and water conservation.

Hans understood that successful agriculture depends upon responsible stewardship of natural resources. He was involved in the creation of the Virgin Islands Conservation District and spent decades working on soil and water conservation. He was also involved in the development and implementation of the Virgin Islands Earth Change Law, an important step in controlling erosion and protecting our land and water resources.

This was not simply honorary service on a board. It was the kind of detailed, long-term work that rarely receives much public attention but has lasting consequences for an island such as ours.

More recently, I encountered Hans in yet another part of community life—as a fellow Trustee at Good Hope Country Day School.

Hans had previously served for many years as a Trustee of The Good Hope School. His connection to these institutions spans much of their history. At Good Hope Country Day School, he continued to provide stewardship and, importantly, institutional memory. Hans could tell us not simply what had happened over the previous 50 years, but why decisions had been made.

When I look back over these experiences, I realize that I kept encountering Hans throughout my own life on St. Croix—but in completely different areas.

First it was a swimming pool.

Then it was cycling and the Virgin Islands Olympic movement.

Then it was Annaly Farms, Senepol cattle as well as soil and water conservation.

Then education.

And those are only the areas in which our lives happened to intersect.

There are very few people I have met during my 41 years on St. Croix who have contributed so much to this community in so many different ways.

There is one final contribution that is more personal but deserves mention.

Hans's commitment to his family has always impressed me. As busy as he was with his work and other community activities, family was always a priority. His family, including three generations, has benefitted not only from his love and care for them, but from the extraordinary body of work he has devoted to his community.

They—and all of us on St. Croix—are beneficiaries of his life's work.

So far.

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

John W. Harper