

**TESTIMONY OF SIOBHAN JAMES-ALEXANDER, CEO OF VIYA
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING, TRANSPORTATION AND
TELECOMMUNICATIONS
April 23, 2025**

Honorable Chairman Marvin Blyden, Members of the Committee on Housing, Transportation and Telecommunications, members of the 36th Legislature and their staff, and the listening and viewing audience, my name is Siobhan James-Alexander and I am the Chief Executive Officer for the Virgin Islands Telephone Corporation, known locally as Viya. Thank you for inviting me to testify on the future of telecommunications in the Territory and the current issues facing the industry.

The Future is Now

When my predecessor, Geraldine Pitt, testified before this Committee two years ago on the future of telecommunications, she detailed several initiatives intended to deliver an unprecedented, and unparalleled level of service to Virgin Islanders. These initiatives included:

- deploying fiber deeper into our network and upgrading our network from DOCSIS 3.0 to 3.1 so that we can deliver faster speeds to our customers. We have completed this effort and Virgin Islanders are receiving the highest Internet speeds ever. Our lowest consumer tier of service is now 200 Mbs and gigabit service is available throughout a majority of the Territory. Viya has led the way on achieving this and we continue to work on network improvements to deliver service to our

customers. Keeping Virgin Islanders connected to the world is our primary mission and I am pleased to report that we are delivering on that promise.

- We have augmented our inter-island connectivity establishing a redundant subsea link and installing significant wireless backup capacity between St. John and St. Thomas so that we can minimize the impact of any future outages on the St John-St. Thomas. This establishes three diverse routes connecting St. John – St. Thomas, we continue to work with our vendors to build more resiliency into the inter-island connections.
- We executed on the award of the Virgin Islands Department of Education (VIDE) Wide Area Network contract and look forward to continuing that relationship as we support their need to deliver world-class education services.
- On the mobile side, Viya deployed 21 5G sites, giving us the largest 5G coverage in the Territory. We have also optimized our 4G/LTE network to address the recent performance issues some of our customers have been experiencing. As a result of these efforts, many of our customers are already realizing tremendous improvement in their call quality and data speeds and we are replicating this throughout the Virgin Islands
- The transition to our all-digital cable television platform is complete, providing customers with greatly enhanced viewing experience.
- Viya has diversified the entire customer care experience, making it easier than ever to get service from Viya and stay connected with the world. Our retail stores

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located on each of the three islands have extended their evening and Saturday hours to better accommodate customers' schedules. Customers can transact most business with us online through our website, email, text, and social media. We are constantly engaging with our customers, wherever they are. Even more exciting, Viya is expanding its presence in communities by working with local dealers and deploying pop-up stores to bring Viya services closer to the customer.

While I am appearing before you today as the Company representative, I am here on behalf of the entire Viya team that is dedicated to delivering the highest quality services to our customers and I wish to express my deepest appreciation for their tireless efforts to keep the Virgin Islands connected to the world.

I know that recently some members of the Senate have expressed concerns about Viya's restructuring efforts and the impact that it is having on our employees so I want to take a moment to address this.

First, it should be well understood that Viya is a small fish in a very large pond. We compete with billion-dollar companies both in the mobile and broadband space. As a private business we need to be able to invest in the technology of the future, to drive higher speeds and we need to free up capital to do so. As part of our continuing efforts to reshape the business to meet these challenges we have had to make some tough decisions.

Throughout the process we have been sensitive to the needs of our employees, particularly those who have served with us for so long. We have made every effort to smooth their transition back into the broader workforce or even retirement.

We are increasing our investment in our employees. To further improve the customer experience, we are introducing the concept of the “Universal Technician” where we are providing extensive training to all of our technicians so that they can perform cross-functionally and one technician will be able to address all of a customer’s needs whether it is for mobile service, Internet, cable television, or landline telephone. This investment in our workforce is good for the Company, good for the customer, and good for the employee.

When combined with the other measures we are undertaking to enhance the customer experience, I am confident that Viya will be able to thrive in this highly competitive environment and meet the expectations of Virgin Islanders.

The Road Ahead

In its invitation to testify, the Chair asked witnesses to address issues related to BEAD funding, federal policy, infrastructure, industry cooperation, and permitting. Let me address each of those briefly.

So far under the new Administration, federal telecommunications policy has not changed significantly – yet. The FCC Chair recently invited the industry to recommend regulations that can be eliminated or reduced in a proceeding he titled “Delete, Delete, Delete,” which

gives you a sense of where he wants to go. The Supreme Court recently heard arguments in the case *FCC v. Consumer Research* that challenges the constitutionality of the universal service program. A decision is expected in June and would impact the entire United States, not just the Virgin Islands. I should note that the FCC already reduced universal support by nearly fifty percent (50%) when it awarded Liberty the Connect USVI fund in 2020. I would note there is no anticipated replacement for the Connect USVI fund once it expires in 2030.

BEAD funding appears to be on track and the Broadband Office is moving ahead with its process to accept applications for funding. Viya intends to partner with local organizations to secure funding in areas such as cyber-security and telehealth. As this Committee knows, Viya has been a strong advocate of consumer subsidies because we believe broadband connectivity is an issue of affordability, not availability. The recent turmoil in the labor and financial markets are putting greater stress on consumers and making the case for subsidies even stronger. Viya remains available to work with the Broadband Office and interested parties to implement a subsidy mechanism that will help Virgin Islands receive the benefits of broadband service.

As regards permitting, Viya has experienced an increase in incidents involving contractors damaging our infrastructure when performing work for other utility and service providers. From our perspective, this is a failure of those other carriers, but also of the Department of Public Works and Department of Planning and Natural Resources. These agencies should not be issuing permits until the applicant can show that they have communicated

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with relevant carriers regarding their project. Continued improvement in this area is critical to service continuity and we ask this Committee to encourage all network operators to adhere to the “Call before you dig” policy, which will minimize these occurrences that disrupt business operations and services not only for Viya, but our customers as well.

Lastly, we are still challenged with collections from government and statutory bodies and larger businesses whose connectivity is essential to their operations. We understand their critical roles in the community and serving the Virgin Islands, and so we have been cautious and reluctant to do disconnections. But maintaining these large past due balances reduces capital available to us for reinvestment in the business.

Conclusion

I would like to close by saying that I am very optimistic about Viya’s future in the Territory because at Viya we always put the Virgin Islands first. I am proud to represent Viya’s employees before you today. It is only through their hard work, dedication and commitment to the community that Viya is successful. And I wish to offer a special thanks to the team who worked through Christmas to get us reconnected to St John and who are continuing to redesign redundant paths.

In the coming days as we celebrate Carnival, an event that unites us as ONE, Virgin Islanders will witness a rebirth and an evolution of Viya, with a focus on ONE mission and ONE vision.. We have many exciting events planned and will be celebrating with the

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people of the Virgin Islands. I welcome members of this Committee to attend our events and learn more about our plans for the remainder of this year and beyond.

Our future is bright, and our customers can continue to depend on us for years to come.

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to present my testimony.