



TESTIMONY

LEONA E. SMITH - NOMINEE

VIRGIN ISLANDS PORT AUTHORITY BOARD OF GOVERNORS

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Good morning, Honorable Carla Joseph, Chairwoman of the 36th Legislature's Committee on Rules and Judiciary; Vice Chairman, the Honorable Kenneth L. Gittens; esteemed Members of the Legislature of the Virgin Islands; legislative staff; and members of the community who are present or viewing remotely.

Professional Background

I am Leona E. Smith, and I have been nominated to serve as the St. John representative on the Virgin Islands Port Authority's Board of Governors. I previously served as the St. John Administrator from 2007 to 2014, representing the Governor of the Virgin Islands on key matters concerning the island. Before my role as Administrator, I spent 17 years as a coordinator at the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs. Additionally, I worked as a part-time U.S. Customs and Border Protection Inspector and Officer for 19 years. I served as a researcher and investigator of constituent complaints at the Legislature of the Virgin Islands. I hold a Bachelor of Science degree in Criminal Justice and an Associate degree in Legal Research.

I have also served on several boards, including the Board of Tax Review, the Board of Directors of the West Indian Company, Ltd., the Board of Trustees for the Government Employees Retirement System, and the V.I. Board of Elections. Additionally, I served as the President and Chairperson of the St. John Festival and

Cultural Organization for many years. I currently serve as the Assistant Director of Festivals for St. John at the U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Tourism.

I was appointed to the VIPA Board in May 2019 and served until my term expired in May 2022. I returned to the Board in December 2022. During my first term, I was elected Board Chair in 2019 and 2020 and served as Board Secretary until my term expired in December 2025. Today, I seek your approval to continue to serve on the Port Authority Board as a representative of the island of St. John.

About the Virgin Islands Port Authority (VIPA)

VIPA plays an essential role in the U.S. Virgin Islands' economy. Our goal is to modernize port facilities, improve cargo, cruise, and inter-island ferry services, ensure the safety of aviation and maritime operations, and enhance economic benefits throughout the Territory. The Virgin Islands legislature established the Authority as an autonomous agency that finances its operations.

In my testimony today, I will provide a brief overview of recent VIPA Board policies and initiatives, with a primary focus on St. John projects.

VIPA Capital Projects – St. John

Loredon L. Boynes Sr. Dock Improvements

The Boynes Dock is the main port of entry to St. John. Ferry operators provide service from this facility to Red Hook and the Charlotte Amalie Harbor in St. Thomas. VIPA has significantly completed the repairs to the Boynes Dock in Cruz Bay, St. John.

The renovation project at the Boynes Dock included resurfacing the pier, installing a canopy adjacent to the existing terminal, and adding a men's and women's restroom and an electrical room for an emergency power generator. The project is funded through a **\$1.5 million** appropriation from the U.S. Virgin Islands Legislature from the St. John Capital Improvement Fund (**Acts 8401 and 8644**). VIPA awarded the project to Rodriguez and Garland via a competitive bidding process.

VIPA has temporarily closed a portion of the waiting area of the Loredon L. Boynes Sr. Dock as a safety precaution until underwater structural repairs can be completed. The Authority's marine consultant, Moffatt and Nichol, is accelerating the design, permitting, and bidding phases of this project so the work can begin as soon as possible. While VIPA will not have a final repair cost until bids are received, this work is part of a larger project to reinforce the dock's underside at this facility.

Enighed Pond Community Park

The 34th Legislature of the Virgin Islands approved **Act No. 8473**, which appropriated **\$400,000** for the design of a multi-purpose facility located on 3.75 acres of land owned by the Virgin Islands Port Authority at the Theovald Moorehead Dock and Terminal in Cruz Bay, St. John. These funds have been received and expended. The 36th Legislature also appropriated funds from the Southern Trust Company Settlement Fund via **Act 8920** for the construction of a Cultural Center. The Port Authority has not yet received these funds.

In February 2025, the Virgin Islands Port Authority (VIPA) met with residents to present updated designs for the Community Park, which will be built on VIPA-owned land near the Theovald Moorehead Dock at Enighed Pond in Cruz Bay, St. John.

VIPA's project contractor, Moffatt and Nichol, is finalizing the design and preparing to present the project to the relevant permitting agencies. VIPA plans to advertise the project for bidding in 2026.

Fisherman's Facility in Cruz Bay

VIPA's contractor, Moffatt & Nichol, is completing designs of the proposed Cruz Bay Fish Market, funded by the Virgin Islands Legislature through **Act No. 8515**. The design will incorporate feedback from public meetings with fishermen and stakeholders. VIPA will present the proposed plans at a pending hearing before the Historic Preservation Committee of St. John.

VIPA Marine Tariff Rates Increase

VIPA has decided to increase certain marine tariff rates following a review of its financial obligations and pending infrastructure projects. Public hearings were held in St. John, St. Thomas, and St. Croix from October 6 to 8, 2025, during which stakeholder feedback prompted revisions. Notable decisions include:

- The board rejected the new barge ramp fee per passenger at the Noel E. Boynes Car Ferry Dock.

- The parking lot at the Victor Sewer Marine Facility will not be converted to paid parking, but enforcement will be strengthened.
- Approved changes include a new fee structure for the Noel Boyes Car Ferry Barge, increased BVI Inter-Island Ship Dues and Wharfage from \$8 to \$12, and a phased increase in docking fees.
- Additional changes include a new fee structure for the Urman V. Fredericks Parking Garage, increased pilotage rates, and a new cargo overflow staging fee.

The new rates will take effect on **April 6, 2026**, and will be reviewed every five years. The updated tariff will be available on VIPA's website by April 1, 2026.

Conclusion

VIPA has made considerable progress in enhancing its aviation and marine facilities through its capital projects program and public-private partnerships to modernize and upgrade airport terminals and seaports. As a former board member and an active participant in the travel and tourism industry, I believe my experience will enable me to contribute effectively to the Board and continue this progressive work. I appreciate your consideration of my nomination to serve the people of the Virgin Islands, especially those in St. John. I am available to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,
Leona E. Smith