

TESTIMONY OF MAGISTRATE JUDGE VENETIA H. VELAZQUEZ
JUDICIAL NOMINEE
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON RULES AND JUDICIARY
NOVEMBER 13, 2025

Members of the Committee on Rules and Judiciary, other members of the 36th Legislature present, family, friends, colleagues of the Superior Court, listening and viewing audience. Good morning. I am pleased to come before you today as the nominee to serve as Judge on the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands, District of St. Croix. I want to first thank the Honorable Albert Bryan, Jr. for putting his confidence in me, on behalf of the people of these Virgin Islands, through this nomination. I understand and fully embrace the significance, commitment and immense responsibility of the office for which I am being considered. And I stand before you ready to assume this challenge.

It is true that we all bring to the table our full life experiences that make up who we are. I will, therefore, begin by telling you a bit more about me -- beyond the resume. I was born on St. Croix - the last of six children to Senator William S. Harvey and Florabelle L. Petersen (Benn). My mother is from generations of Crucians from Gallows Bay, with a paternal family from Santo Domingo and St. Croix. My father was born in New York, to a St. Thomian mother; however, he, too, grew up in Gallows Bay on St. Croix from the age of three, following the death of his Virginian father. Despite their shared Crucian/Gallows Bavian upbringing, as luck would have it, my parents would meet in New York. Eventually, they returned home with their five children in tow; I would later come along (the only one born on St. Croix). However, my parents' relationship did not survive, and my mother soon found herself a single mother of six. Those were difficult times as she regained her footing. We didn't have much. We lived for a couple of years in the Ralph De Chabert Housing Community. But my mother worked hard as a lifelong public health nurse to ensure we had everything we needed, even if not everything we wanted. Eventually, my mother

bought a home in the newly developed Mon Bijou community -- directly across the street from my father. I would spend the balance of my childhood in Mon Bijou and Gallows Bay. Mother would later marry and have two more children, and we became a family of eight children. So, including my extended Harvey siblings, I came from a very large family of 13 children. I would not be here, but for the love and example of my parents, whom I miss immensely - especially today, which is Daddy's birthday. I cannot help but think of them both and how proud they would have been of my accomplishments thus far.

I was primarily educated in the public school system, with the exception of two years spent at the St. Mary's Catholic School, and graduated from Cardozo High School in Washington, D.C. I joined the Marine Corps Reserve and completed Basic Training at Parris Island, South Carolina, before beginning my undergraduate studies at Howard University in December 1981. I studied Human Communication and Political Science, earning a Bachelor of Arts. After completing my undergraduate studies, I took what was to be a "brief" break before beginning law school, which turned into 12 years. But that turned out to be one of the most enriching periods of my life. During that time, I worked as a journalist in Indiana and St. Croix, earned a Master of Arts from the University of the Virgin Islands in Education Leadership, and taught for a number of years at the St. Croix Central High School, where I started a student quadrille group. Engaging students in our culture continued a passion I first developed as a youngster, dancing with the Milton Payne Quadrille group, and which I have continued into adulthood as a member of the St. Croix Cultural Heritage Dancers and, now, as a member of the Ay Ay Cultural Group.

I enrolled in Howard University School of Law in 1997, taking with me my two young children, then ages 5 and 7. Together, we navigated the rigors of law school, where I earned CALI Excellence Awards in Legal Research and Writing, Advanced Legal Research, Remedies,

Corporations and Sales and Secured Transactions, and I served on the Howard Law Journal. In May 2000, I graduated 5th in my law school class of approximately 130 students and returned home. I was admitted to the Virgin Islands Bar in 2001, and was later admitted to practice before the United States Supreme Court; the Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit and the District Court of the Virgin Islands. Moreover, since 2012, I have been certified as a mediator by the Florida Supreme Court, after having completed the requisite coursework at the University of South Florida, Conflict Resolution Collaborative. I have remained an active member of the Virgin Islands Bar Association, serving in a number of leadership roles: Trustee of the inaugural Bar Foundation; court-appointed member of the Board of Professional Responsibility; Chair and Member of the Legislation and Law Reform Committee; Chair and member of the Bar Journal Committee; Chair and member of the Unauthorized Practice of Law Committee; Judge of the High School Moot Court competition for a number of years.

Having witnessed my parents' enduring commitment to public service and to this community, I truly never considered committing my education or my life to anything but public service, or to any place but home. And that is, in fact, what I have done. My legal career reflects that commitment.

I began my career at the very Court on which I now sit, first as a law clerk intern in 1998 and, from 2000 – 2002, as a law clerk to the Honorable Maria M. Cabret (now Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the Virgin Islands). Over the years, I served at every level of the justice system – from appellate staff attorney at the Appellate Division of the District Court of the Virgin Islands; to the first Clerk of Court at the Supreme Court of the Virgin Islands and Clerk of the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands; Assistant Territorial Public Defender, defending persons charged with crimes in the trial court and challenging criminal convictions on appeal before the

Supreme Court of the Virgin Islands; Deputy Chief Counsel to the Office of the Governor; prosecutor; police trainer and advisor; hearing officer; civil litigator and Civil Chief at the Virgin Islands Department of Justice and, presently, as Magistrate Judge. In all of these roles, I contributed significantly to this Territory and to the administration of justice, and it would be impossible to discuss them all. Therefore, in the interest of time, I will discuss just a few of the meaningful contributions that helped me to grow as a lawyer and, now, a jurist.

Among those contributions was service as an attorney trainer and advisor to the police. One of my greatest joys, in that role, was serving as the assigned 24-hour on-call attorney for police officers throughout the territory, providing advice and assistance to officers as they carried out their duties on our streets. I viewed – and still view -- that role as one of the most significant contributions of my career. That is because doing so served, not only the interests of officers and the Justice Department in avoiding evidence suppression issues, but also helped to preserve the individual rights of every person in this community who came in contact with the police. It was a difficult role to fulfill, but one I took very seriously, as I understood that the rule of law, the liberty of citizens and, potentially, lives were at stake.

I am also immensely proud of my contributions to the people of this Territory in my almost nine years at the V.I. Justice Department and, particularly, my tenure in the Civil Division. As a civil litigator, I defended and prosecuted the Government's interests before the local and federal courts in both Districts, before the District Court of the Southern District of New York and the District Court of the District of Columbia. And, as Chief of the Civil Division, I effectively managed the cases filed by and against the Government; led a team of attorneys in defending the Government, its agencies and employees in litigation; pursued civil actions on behalf of consumers – both individually and in multi-state litigation; and managed outside counsels contracted by the

Government. I represented the Territory in the consent decree cases in federal court against the Police Department and the Bureau of Corrections (St. Croix), the Epstein-related cases, and other significant matters impacting the public and the Government. Finally, I have had the **honor** of helping to grow the next generation of criminal justice professionals, by serving as a part-time instructor at the University of the Virgin Islands from 2015-2024, teaching the Administration of Justice, Criminal Evidence and Criminal Procedure, and other courses.

Having served as a Magistrate Judge for the past year, I fully grasp the need for judges to lead with empathy as they manage the cases before them. And I understand the importance of persons who come before the Court leaving with the knowledge that, even if they did not prevail, they were at least heard. I also understand the need to timely resolve disputes, so that parties may move on with their lives, and I have worked hard to do so. In civil and family matters, I schedule and hear cases timely, and issue orders or judgments promptly after cases are heard -- usually within 24 hours. In the year since taking the Bench, I have issued 570 orders in Civil Cases and closed 532 of those cases. In Probate cases, I have entered 282 orders and closed 46 cases. My pending probate case load is 139, which includes 68 new cases filed in the past year and others that were reopened on motion by parties. I have presided over hundreds of traffic, litter and criminal proceedings – advice of rights, arraignments, plea proceedings, competency hearings, and promptly set criminal bench trials. Further, I review and issue, without delay, arrest and search warrants, and temporary restraining orders. I also continue to contribute to the Court's broader goals, by serving on the Court's Bench/Bar Committee, volunteering to mediate civil and family cases that are assigned to judges and serving on a committee led by the presiding judge to develop protocols and a Bench Book as a ready resource for incoming Magistrate Judges.

If confirmed, I will continue in my commitment to ensure full access to the courts through timely decision making, without compromising thoroughness and reasoning, and I vow to carry out my duties in a manner that does justice to all who seek redress there. In that regard, I will immediately begin assessing and triaging the case docket I would inherit to identify potential conflicts and determine whether there are delays that may be ameliorated. I will then take intentional steps, as required, to move those matters forward, using as a personal goal and benchmark for self-assessment the Differentiated Case Management Plan that I developed as Clerk of Court and which was formally adopted by the Court in 2013 -- or other guidelines as amended.

Senators, over the course of my legal career, I have approached every assigned task with the seriousness, reflection, energy and intellectual rigor required. And, along the way, I have had the benefit of invaluable mentors to guide my growth. I also independently took steps to further ensure my readiness for this moment, by attending the Judicial Academy for Aspiring Judges, at the National Judicial College in Reno, Nevada in 2023, and have also successfully completed its General Jurisdiction course of study for trial judges in 2025. I am prepared to assume responsibility as judge of the Superior Court. I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today, and I stand ready to answer any questions you may have.

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