

**Testimony of
Jennifer Matarangas-King, Commissioner-Nominee
US Virgin Islands Department of Tourism
Before the Committee on Rules and Judiciary
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Good afternoon Senator Carla Joseph, Chairwoman of the Committee on Rules and Judiciary for the 36th Legislature of the United States Virgin Islands, members of the Committee, Senators, Legislative Staff, Ladies and Gentlemen in the chamber, and the viewing and listening audience. I am Jennifer Matarangas-King, Commissioner Nominee for the U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Tourism.

Before I begin, I would like to thank the Honorable Governor Albert Bryan, Jr. and the Honorable Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach for this opportunity, their support, and votes of confidence. I am humbled and honored to appear before you today as Commissioner-Nominee for the US Virgin Islands Department of Tourism. I thank the members of this committee for the opportunity to share my qualifications, my vision, and my unwavering commitment to the people and culture of these islands we call home.

Background:

I was born in 1970 at the Charles Harwood Memorial Hospital on the island of St. Croix to Agatha G. Edwards and Maurice Knight. My educational journey began at Theodora Dunbavin Moravian School, where I entered kindergarten, and continued at Pearl B. Larsen Elementary School, where I was honored to be part of the academically talented program. This formative experience cultivated my intellectual curiosity, discipline, and enduring love for learning. It was during these early years that I embraced the values of community, resilience, and service—principles that have guided my personal and professional life ever since.

I graduated from St. Dunstan's Episcopal School in 1987 and pursued higher education at Smith College in Massachusetts, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree with a double major in English Literature and Afro-American Studies. I later obtained a Master of Arts in Organizational Communication from Howard University, where I also completed doctoral coursework. My academic achievements were recognized through multiple honors, including placement on the College Dean's List, the National Dean's List, and designation as an All-American Scholar.

Throughout my academic journey, I consistently sought to complement classroom learning with real-world experience. I held positions in customer care, managed small retail operations, served as a media relations intern at U.S. News & World Report, and

taught at my alma mater, Howard University. Each of these roles enriched my understanding of leadership, communication, and service—shaping the way I empower teams and engage with stakeholders today.

As a native Virgin Islander, one of the greatest honors and opportunities of my life is to be able to step into this role and showcase our home to the world as one of the best places to visit. My background in marketing, communications, government, and community relations—developed over three decades of professional experience, including more than twenty-six years with Viya—has provided me with the expertise and transferable skills necessary to lead our tourism strategy with both creativity and discipline. Throughout my career, I have learned that the most impactful progress comes from strong partnerships, clear communication, and a deep respect for the people and communities we serve. Those principles continue to guide me every day as I work to advance the Department of Tourism's mission.

My tenure at Viya allowed me to work across multiple sectors—technology, media, government affairs, and community engagement—each of which strengthened my ability to navigate complex challenges, manage large-scale projects, and foster collaboration among diverse stakeholders. Whether overseeing corporate transformation as President and General Manager of Innovative Cable TV or leading public relations and community giving initiatives that connected businesses and families across the Territory, my focus has always been on service, transparency, and impact. Those same values inform the way I now approach tourism leadership: by ensuring that our growth as a destination also strengthens the social and economic fabric of our islands. Before assuming this role, I served as a Board Member of the St. Croix Hotel and Tourism Association from 2005 to 2007. I remained actively engaged with the broader USVI hospitality sector by ensuring Viya's continued participation as an Allied Member, recognizing the essential role of technology in enhancing tourism and guest experiences.

As Commissioner, I bring both a global perspective and a deep local understanding. I know that every policy we advance and every campaign we launch must ultimately benefit the people who call the Virgin Islands home. That means creating meaningful opportunities for our residents, promoting our culture with authenticity, and building an industry that is resilient, inclusive, and future-focused. My academic training in communications and organizational leadership, paired with decades of hands-on experience in public and private sectors, has taught me how to build consensus, motivate teams, and transform ideas into measurable results.

It is also deeply personal for me. I grew up on St. Croix, surrounded by the warmth, ingenuity, and cultural richness that make our Territory so special. To now have the opportunity to tell that story to the world—to elevate the voices of Virgin Islanders,

showcase our artists, chefs, and entrepreneurs, and ensure that our festivals, traditions, and natural beauty are celebrated globally—is profoundly meaningful.

Throughout my career, I have been honored to receive recognitions from the community that embody the principles I deeply value—leadership, service, and a commitment to community. Notable among these are:

- The Virgin Islands Democratic Party Mario DeChabert Trailblazer Award (2006)
- The New Horizon’s Democratic Club Woman of Influence (2012)
- Paul Harris Fellow for Rotary Club of St. Croix (2013)
- Rotary Club of St. Croix Vocational Award (2014)
- Ten Sleepless Knights – 7 Women, 7 Purpose Honoree (2015)
- Women Striving for Success Presidential Award (2017)
- 175th Emancipation Committee Honors – Dozen Roses on International Women’s Day (2024)
- St. John’s Episcopal Church 264th Year of Rededication Honoree (2024)
- Sejah Farm Bush Cook-Chef Cook Honoree (2025)

These honors represent more than individual achievements—they embody the shared spirit and resilience that propel our islands toward a brighter future.

As I move forward in this role, I am committed to maintaining a balance between progress and preservation. We will continue to expand our partnerships, invest in workforce development, and enhance the visitor experience, while protecting the culture, environment, and heritage that define us. Tourism is not just an economic driver—it is a shared expression of who we are as a people. I am deeply proud to represent the U.S. Virgin Islands in this capacity and remain steadfast in my commitment to ensuring that our tourism success benefits every island, every community, and every Virgin Islander.

The First 90 Days:

In my first 90 days as Commissioner of Tourism, I have focused on retaining the strength of our tourism department through deliberate action, collaboration, and accountability. Recognizing the crucial role that air and sea access play in attracting visitors, I engaged directly with airline executives during airline meetings at Routes Americas, positioning the U.S. Virgin Islands as a strong and reliable partner for increased airlift. We also held strategic meetings with cruise lines and participated in the Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association (FCCA) Conference, where our delegation worked to secure greater visibility for the Territory in future cruise itineraries and enhance our competitiveness in the Caribbean market.

I was proud to represent the U.S. Virgin Islands at the Caribbean Tourism Organization's State of the Industry Conference, where we reaffirmed our leadership role in the tourism sector and emphasized the importance of inter-regional collaboration. These engagements have reinforced our presence as a respected voice in the region—one that continues to advocate for the growth and resilience of Caribbean destinations.

Internally, I have placed strong emphasis on strengthening our organizational structure to improve performance and service delivery. We made new hires in St. Croix to support local operations, including two new Directors of Visitor Experience, Assistant Director of Festivals for St. Croix, Social Media Specialist, and Communications Specialist. We have also implemented promotions and restructuring in St. Thomas to ensure that our team is well-equipped to meet the evolving demands of the industry. These efforts have evened our workforce across the districts, modernizing the Department, increasing efficiency, and better serving both our residents and visitors.

We have also taken tangible steps to enhance the visitor experience at St. Croix's arrival hubs, improving the flow, comfort, and service quality for travelers from the moment they arrive. Collaboration remains at the core of our approach. In the past three months, we have conducted numerous meetings with local associations, tourism stakeholders, and community partners to ensure that our efforts align with shared priorities and that the benefits of tourism reach every corner of our Territory.

Equally important, we have focused on building for the future through strategic partnerships. I am particularly proud of our collaboration with the University of the Virgin Islands on the "WOW Wednesday" initiative, one of many new programs designed to engage students in the tourism industry, foster career readiness, and inspire the next generation of Virgin Islanders to contribute to shaping our tourism legacy.

In my capacity, I have had the privilege to:

- Engage with the Boards of the St. Croix Hotel and Tourism Association and the St. Thomas-St. John Hotel and Tourism Association to strengthen industry collaboration.
- Participate in the Certificate Ceremony for the Supercharged Training initiative, sponsored by the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association's Education Foundation, in support of workforce development.
- Attend a Town Hall meeting hosted by Governor Albert Bryan Jr. and the Christiansted Restaurant and Retail Association, focused on advancing the administration's support for small businesses in Christiansted.
- Collaborate with the Research and Technology Park and the Community Impact Fund to launch the inaugural Crucian Christmas Festival Micro Loan Program, aimed at empowering local entrepreneurs.
- Convene with leadership from the Chambers of Commerce across all districts to foster economic dialogue and partnership.

Collectively, these actions represent the continued elevation of and a clear direction for the Department. We are moving with purpose—strengthening partnerships, investing in people, and ensuring that the U.S. Virgin Islands continues to shine as a premier destination built on authenticity, excellence, and opportunity for all.

The Path Forward:

As we look to the future of U.S. Virgin Islands tourism, I aim to build on the tremendous momentum of the past six years, led by former Commissioner Joseph Boschulte, whose leadership helped increase airlift and cruise calls, elevate visitor arrivals, yield record-breaking TARF collections, and expand marketing initiatives promoting the territory on a global scale.

Together with the dynamic and diligent Department of Tourism staff and agency partners, I have developed an agenda to continue promoting the U.S. Virgin Islands as a premier tourism destination in all viable tourist markets worldwide, as mandated by the U.S. Virgin Islands Code Title 3 - Executive Chapter 19.

Our global marketing efforts, which include leading the region in innovative sports, lifestyle, and entertainment partnerships, utilizing emerging marketing tactics, integrated media relations, social and influencer campaigns, and authentically showcasing our most valuable asset —our people —will undoubtedly continue, even expanding when needed and appropriate. We have the best team in the industry, comprising some of the greatest minds who not only understand the industry but also possess extensive experience and industry knowledge, which gives us a competitive advantage in terms of limitless growth potential.

We will also continue to participate in key industry trade shows including Routes (World and Americas), CAPA Airline Leader Summit, World Travel Market, Trav Media's International Media Marketplace, International PowWow (IPW), Seatrade, Travel & Adventure, National Association of Black Hotel Owners, Operators, and Developers Conference (NABHOOD), CHTA Marketplace, IMEX, Caribbean Hotel Investment Conference & Operations Summit (CHICOS), Caribbean Hospitality Industry Exchange Forum (CHIEF), and National Association of Black Journalist Annual Convention. Additionally, we will maintain our membership in key associations, including the Caribbean Tourism Organization, the Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association, and Brand USA.

Not to be forgotten, I also aim to expand and propel ground game efforts, including local connectivity with those directly and indirectly tied to the tourism industry, underscoring my new homegrown campaign **"V"ested "I"nterest**, centered on building community accountability, excitement and action to contribute to our destination's success. Tied to local elevation is the Destination Optimization program, which, to date, has increased local business presence on Google, making it easier for visitors to find the gems we know exist on our islands. This winter, the program will continue to make a dedicated, concerted effort in the St Croix district, providing free services including coaching and photography to elevate businesses' Google listings.

Closing

I would like to thank the members of the Committee for allowing me the time and opportunity to present my qualifications, recent achievements, and future goals, as I look forward to assuming the role of Commissioner of the Department of Tourism.

My passion for my home, our home, will underscore my efforts in showcasing the U.S. Virgin Islands to the world. As the child of immigrants whose mother and father hailed from St. Kitts and Barbados, respectively, I am truly humbled by this opportunity and I will never take it for granted. I know my parents are looking down on me and smiling.

Tourism is the cornerstone of our economy, and our vested interest in its sustenance and growth supports us all. The work has already begun, and together we will keep it going.

Thank you to everyone who has been a part of this journey with me. I would like to say a special thank you to:

- Governor Albert Bryan, Jr., Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach and the Bryan-Roach administration.
- My husband Attorney Daniel Matarangas-King and my daughter Alexis Matarangas-King who are my biggest cheerleaders.
- Sheri and Azik Myers- My sister and brother-in-law who always offer wise counsel and love.
- My dedicated team from the Department of Tourism who are here with me in the Chambers, the teams in St. Croix, St. John and abroad as well as those traveling and watching remotely.
- Former Commissioner Joseph Boschulte for your support during this transition.
- And lastly a heartfelt appreciation to the members of our community in the Territory and abroad who offered tremendous support, well wishes and votes of confidence over the past three months as I embarked on this new journey.

Thank you Chairwoman Joseph, I am available for any questions that you and the members of this esteemed body may have today.