

**Chairperson:** Economic Development & Agriculture  
**Vice Chair:** Committee Government Operations,  
Veterans Affairs & Consumer Protection  
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Committee on Budget Appropriations and Finance  
Committee on Homeland Security, Justice & Public  
Safety  
Committee on Education and Workforce



# Legislature of the U.S. Virgin Islands

#3022 ESTATE GOLDEN ROCK  
ST. CROIX, U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS 00820  
TELEPHONE: (340) 712-2246  
EMAIL: SENATORJJAMES@LEGVI.ORG

The Honorable Senator  
**JAVAN E. JAMES**  
★ ★ ★ ★ 35<sup>TH</sup> LEGISLATURE

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TO: Kurell A. Sheridan, JD  
Executive Director  
35<sup>th</sup> Legislature of the Virgin Islands

CC: All Senators

FROM: Senator Javan E. James, Sr.   
Chairman, Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture

SUBJECT: **Committee Report for Wednesday, April 12, 2023**

DATE: May 13, 2023

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Following the Rules of the 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands, please find enclosed the report for the Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture hearing, held on Wednesday, April 12, 2023, at the Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall on the island of St. Thomas.

The Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture was called to order at 10:25 a.m. by Chairman Javan E. James, Sr.

Chairman James, Sr. acknowledged and congratulated Aliyah Boston for being selected as the No.1 pick for the WNBA. Ms. Aliyah Boston hails from the island of St. Thomas and will be playing for the Indiana Fever of the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA). Chairman James, Sr. also acknowledged the recent nomination of Dr. Louis Petersen stating that he will need to go through the process and be sworn in to permanently lead the Department of Agriculture.

Chairman James, Sr. requested a roll call and the reading of the agenda. Chairman James also thanked the Honorable Senators, both committee and non-committee members as well as acknowledged Senate President Novelle E. Francis, Jr. for attending the meeting.

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Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture  
April 12, 2023

### **Legislative Attendance**

#### **Committee Members in Attendance:**

The Honorable Javan E. James, Sr. - **Chairperson**  
The Honorable Angel L. Bolques, Jr - **Vice Chairman**  
The Honorable Marvin A. Blyden  
The Honorable Diane T. Capehart  
The Honorable Dwayne M. DeGraff  
The Honorable Alma Francis Heyliger  
The Honorable Donna A. Frett-Gregory

#### **Non-Committee Members in Attendance:**

The Honorable Senate President Novelle E. Francis, Jr.

#### **Office of Public Affairs**

Mrs. Africah Harrigan  
Jahmel Leonard  
Omari Hicks  
Kashief Hamilton

#### **Legislative Reporters**

Vashti O. Gerard  
Nataya A. M. Munoz

#### **Staff of Office of Senator Javan E. James, Sr.**

Andrea Z. Mshila  
Jonathan E. James, Jr.

#### **Legal Counsel**

Attorney Sharline L Rogers

#### **Sergeant-at-Arms**

Shanie Smith

#### **Clerks**

Denisian L. Hodge  
Jonathan E. James, Jr.

#### **Photographer**

Barry Leerdam

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Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture  
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**BLOCK I - 10:00 a.m.**

The Committee received an update from the President of the University of Virgin Islands, School of Agriculture about its programs, funding availability and grants as well as successes and challenges with the program.

**INVITED TESTIFIER:**

1. David Hall  
President – University of the Virgin Islands

Dr. David Hall, President of the University of the Virgin Islands read his testimony into the record. In addition, Dr. Usman Adamu, Dean and Director for the School of Agriculture attended the meeting at the St. Croix Conference room and stood ready for questions. After the reading of the testimonies, Chairman James, Sr. extended eight minutes to each Senator for their line of questioning.

In summary, the School of Agriculture established its programs two years ago and has developed and offered twelve academic programs, which include Six Certificates from different areas; Four Associate and Applied Science Degrees, and Two Bachelor of Science Degrees. The Local Farmers will also have an opportunity to take any of the six certificate programs and retool themselves to apply what they have learned back to their farms. President Hall stated that some of the farmers' top three concerns were more equipment, water, and training. These certificates will address the need for training.

Currently, Dean Adamu is working on several courses for approval by the board. One area is Cannabis Technology and Cannabis Research, which are critical areas based on the decisions that the territory has made. Although courses in these areas have not yet been approved, the programs have been fully developed and ready to be presented to the Board. President Hall stated also that the Cannabis Regulatory Committee has approached the university to see if they can do necessary testing in that area.

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Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture  
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In response to Chairman James Sr, question regarding Dr. Hall's departure, Dr. Hall stated that he will be stepping down from his position as president in July of 2024. He informed Chairman James, Sr. of his work on the Advisory Committee and desire to get it functioning at a strong and proficient level before he leaves. By law, the President will be on the Advisory Committee, and he will ensure the transfer of information and a level of continuity. He further reiterated that the incoming President of the University will need to be involved and that the School of Agriculture is growing.

Chairman James, Sr. thanked President Hall and his team for all that they have done and asked him to continue doing what they are doing as well as focusing on the facilities being fixed. President Hall thanked Chairman James for creating an opportunity for him and Dean Adamu to present their testimony. There being no other business in Block I, the committee went into recess at 1:54 p.m.

**BLOCK II – 1:30 p.m.**

The Committee received an update on the overall status of the Virgin Islands Economic Development Authority with regards to funded programs and grants within the VIEDA; as well as an update on the implementation of the Vision 2040 plan, and Capital Projects and Personnel.

**INVITED TESTIFIER:**

Wayne L. Biggs, Jr.

Chief Executive Officer

Virgin Islands Economic Development Authority

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Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture  
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The Committee reconvened at 2:30 p.m. Chief Executive Officer Wayne Biggs, Jr., accompanied by his Chief Financial Officer, Kelly Thompson Webbe, as well as other members of his team in the chambers placed their testimony into the record.

Chairman James gave seven (7) minutes to each Senator for their line of questioning.

CEO Biggs shared his update and progress on the Vision 2040. He stated his desire to diversify and attract companies to the Virgin Islands. VIEDA has targeted manufacturing companies who desire to have their products with the “Made in the USVI” label. CEO Biggs shared that St. Croix is a logistical hub for trade and commerce as well as a gateway into the US market and to South and Central America. CEO Biggs also highlighted attracting new EDC companies to the Virgin Islands and stated that industry growth depends on bringing in outside industries to the Territory.

With regards to loans for farmers and fishers, CEO Biggs stated that there are plans to bring amendments to the Senate. CEO Biggs discussed the VI Slice Moderate Income Homeownership Program and confirmed that MOA’s have been finalized and signed with three local banks which are in the final stages with other lenders.

**Requests through the Chair:**

- Senator Donna Frett-Gregory requested that the EDA provides this committee with information on the potential costs related to the economic development of the VI slice program. The objective is to see how the legislature can work together with those outside the body to secure some of the CDBG dollars.

There being no other business, Chairman James, Sr. adjourned the meeting at 3:50 p.m.