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Committee on Homeland Security, Justice & Public
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Committee on Education and Workforce




Legislature of the U.S. Virgin Islands

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The Honorable Senator
JAVAN E. JAMES
★ ★ ★ ★ 35TH LEGISLATURE

TO: Kurell A. Sheridan, JD
Executive Director
35th 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, June 21, 2023**

DATE: July 6, 2023

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, June 21, 2023, at the Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall on the island of St. Thomas.

The Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture convened a meeting on Wednesday, June 21, 2023, at 10:00 a.m. The purpose of the meeting was to receive updates from the RT Park of the University of the Virgin Islands as well as the Virgin Islands Department of Planning & Natural Resources operations, funding, farming, and fishing industries.

Chairman James requested roll call and the reading of the agenda. He also thanked the Honorable Senators, for attending the meeting

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Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture
June 21, 2023

Legislative Attendance

Committee Members Present:

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

Committee Members Excused:

The Honorable Marvin A. Blyden
 The Honorable Donna A. Frett-Gregory

Office of Public Affairs

Mrs. Africah Harrigan
 Jamal Potter – Writer Production Technician
 Omari Hicks
 Kashief Hamilton

Legislative Reporters

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 Zahrah Williams – Summer Intern
 Maliah Henry – Summer Intern

Legal Counsel

Attorney Nandi Sekou

Sergeant-at-Arms

Devin Fleming
 Devaughn Dowe

Clerk

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 respective officials of The Virgin Islands Research and Technology Park (RT Park) about its programs.

INVITED TESTIFIERS:

Mr. Peter H. Chapman
Chief Executive Officer
The Virgin Islands Research and Technology Park, Corporation (RT Park)

Ms. Aminah Saleem
Chief of Staff

Eric Sonnier
Director of Entrepreneurship

Sydney Paul
Senior Manager of Marketing & Communications

Torhera Durant
Sustainable Development Associate

Mr. Peter Chapman, Chief Executive Officer of the Virgin Islands Research and Technology Park Corporation (RT Park) presented his testimony with his team that focused on the progress of seven programs initiatives and projects that have been launched or in the pipeline. RT Park Corporation is now in its 21st year and has generated approximately \$13.5 million of which twelve million was generated for financial support to the UVI and ninety per cent has been generated over the last five years. While it was noted that there was limited summer employment, RT Parks boasts of its fourteen full time employees currently on board as well as having advisers who are known as coordinators.

CEO Chapman spoke on the seven programs that included the Accelerate VI, which helps create tech startups to grow their VI business; VI STEM Kids a program designed to provide STEM learning opportunities to school age youth and to introduce basic coding concepts to motivate them to pursue further STEM studies among others such as the Tech Village; Virgin Islands STEM Talent Achieve; The Catalysts Fund Revolving Loan Program; Creativity economy and Innovate STT revitalization initiative for downtown Charlotte Amalie

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Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture
June 21, 2023

BLOCK II – 1:30 p.m.

The Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture reconvened at 1:40 p.m. and received an update status from the Virgin Islands Department of Planning & Natural Resources regarding the status of operations and funding status of the Division of Fish and Wildlife to include the farming and fishing industries.

INVITED TESTIFIERS:

The Honorable Jean-Pierre Oriol
Commissioner
Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources

Director Nicole F. Angeli, PhD
Director
Division of Fish and Wildlife Resources
Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources

Commissioner Jean Pierre Oriol along with Dr. Nicole F. Angeli presented their testimony before the committee. Currently there are approximately 250 commercial fishers who uses thirty ports on various islands. There are over 135 charters that allow residence and tourists to explore our waters and harvest fish like mahi, wahoo and snapper. It is intended that the year 2024 for the department to upgrade fisheries related infrastructure to the maximum extent possible. Also, it was noted that repairs to Gallows Bay will be under way in the next couple of weeks as the contract was executed on June 15, 2023. The Frederiksted Fish market will also undergo redesign and reconstruction. Commissioner stated that in comparison to the other Caribbean islands, the Virgin Islands waters are highly regulated. Fishers are required to submit monthly reports and as well as spot checks are conducted from time to time.

Requests through the Chair:

Senator Capehart would like the RT Park to provide a list of all the companies under the RT Park and the exemptions that they receive through the chair.

Senator DeGraff requested for the cost assessment for sand of all local beaches to the hotels purchase

There being no other business, Chairman James Sr. adjourned the meeting at 3:35 p.m.

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Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture
June 21, 2023

Note taking and prepared by:

Ms. Zahrah Williams – Student Intern

Signed: Zahrah Williams Date: 7/7/2023

Ms. Maliah Henry – Student Intern

Signed: M. Henry Date: 7/7/2023

Supervised by Andrea Mshila
Chief of Staff

Signed: Andrea Mshila Date: 7/7/2023