February 11, 2021

Hon. Senator Genevieve R. Whittaker
Chair, Committee on Education and Workforce Development
34th Legislature of the Virgin Islands
#3022 Estate Golden Rock
St. Croix, VI 00820

RE: Committee Hearing Regarding Certification on the Re-opening of Schools

Dear Honorable Senator Whittaker:

The Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR) acknowledge receipt of your request for testimony on certification of the reopening of schools per Title 17 Chapter 3, Section 24 subsections (a)(2)(A) and (B). We note that it is the Board of Education, in conjunction with the Department of Education that is required to develop and adopt guidelines for the reopening of schools, and that technical consultation is to be provided by agencies such as DPNR. Our historical records do not indicate any specific criteria for DPNR to provide guidance; however, we anticipate that our guidance will be based on air and water quality compliance.

Prior to your request for testimony on the subject, the Department did receive an invitation from the Department of Education (DoE) to participate in the inspection of Pre-K to Third grade schools in the St. Croix District on Friday, February 5, 2021. We were fully prepared to engage in this very important process that morning until the individual scheduled diverted to respond to the Limetree flare up. DPNR has since consulted with several of our counterparts in DoE and Fire Service to determine the extent of observation and inspection required. Their observations detailed minor deficiencies, which are mostly surface-related and easily corrected. We have also consulted with the DoE with respect to compliance with drinking water standards and the DoE is near complete with this process.
DPNR stands ready to assist the Board of Education and the Department of Education with the opening of schools in any way we can.

If you have any further questions or concerns please feel free to contact Austin Callwood, Director of the Division of Environmental Protection, at 340-774-3320.

Sincerely,

Jean-Pierre Oriol
Commissioner