TESTIMONY OF PRESIDENT DAVID HALL
UNIVERSITY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

34TH LEGISLATURE
OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

FRITS E. LAWAETZ LEGISLATIVE
CONFERENCE ROOM
ST. CROIX

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Good Afternoon, Chairwoman Whitaker and members of the Committee on Education and Workforce Development and other members of the 34th Legislature present, other testifiers, members of the press, persons in the viewing and listening audience, ladies and gentlemen. My name is David Hall, President of the University of the Virgin Islands, and it is indeed an honor for me to appear before the committee to offer testimony on behalf of the University of the Virgin Islands. I want to congratulate the new members of this body who were elected, and those who were reelected. I look forward to working closely with the 34th Legislature.

I was asked to address the following topics: 1) the various functions and responsibilities of the UVI Board; 2) highlights of Board accomplishments and challenges; 3) UVI’s role in establishing a pipeline to the VI Department of Education; 4) the status of the Free Tuition Program; 5) new programs; 6) the Nursing program; and 7) the Agriculture program. In the five minutes allotted for Testimony, I will briefly touch on each topic and stand ready to answer any questions.

First, the Board of Trustees is a 17-member Board that sets all policies for the operation of the University. The membership is composed of nine individuals appointed by the Governor, two elected by the Board, and various individuals who are appointed by constituency groups in the University and external to the University like the Board of Education and the Department of Education. The Board is highly effective and a well-functioning governing body that has played an instrumental role in the University’s success.

During the last five years, the Board of Trustees has approved 19 new degree programs, and the Administration has instituted numerous new minors and certificate programs. Some of the new degree programs include a Master’s in Social Work, a Bachelor’s in Fine Arts with a concentration in Theatre, Music and Dance, a Bachelor of Science in Nursing on the St. Croix campus, two interdisciplinary degrees, Master’s in Educational Leadership and Master’s in School Counseling and Guidance in Education, just to name a few. The Board also approved the University’s first PhD degree in Creative Leadership for Innovation and Change. This program has had over the past five years as many as 130 students enrolled, and 15 have already graduated. During this period, the Board also approved a new 5-year strategic plan for the University, entitled *Greatness Through Innovation*. One of the challenges facing the Board is the number of vacancies and some expired terms. We hope that as the Governor appoints additional members that they will be expeditiously confirmed by the Senate so they can help carry the load of a very stretched Board of Trustees.
Second, UVI has a number of programs aimed at supporting the work of the VI Department of Education (VIDE). In particular, I will highlight the work done with teachers. Our School of Education provides students with the preparation for initial certification in Pre-K to grade 12 settings through the Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education and Secondary Preparation programs. We are also building capacity and addressing the critical shortages of the Teaching English as a Second Language and Special Education teaching workforce needs through our certificate and post-baccalaureate certificate programs. We assist with teachers hired on temporary/emergency certificates to complete requisite coursework for obtaining permanent certification. In addition, our School of Education prepares other school professionals like school counselors and school psychologists and other educational leaders for the workforce. Within the past month, we were asked to prepare a new cohort of school psychologists in training in response to the number of retiring school psychologists.

Our VI-EPSCoR’s Education and Workforce Development Team is also working to transform Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) education in the Territory. Our Team has implemented a series of teacher training sessions through the Institute for STEM Education Research and Practice. Thus far, over 4,000 hours of training have been provided to over 115, 6th-12th grade STEM teachers, with 100% representation from our public middle and high schools.

Third, the Free Tuition Program has been an enormous boost to the University and we deeply appreciate the role that this legislative body played in making it a reality. In its first year of implementation, the University experienced a 24% increase in freshmen students and a 34% increase in transfer students. Unfortunately, the second year occurred in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and UVI, as other universities, experienced a decline in enrollment. This program has benefitted approximately 355 students and we have expended so far approximately $1.2 Million. We did suggest to the 33rd Legislature some proposed amendments that would allow more students to benefit from the programs, and we are delighted that Act No. 8415 sponsored by Senators Sarauw, Vialet and James and co-sponsored by Senate President Frett-Gregory now makes the program funding applicable to the Dual Credit program so high school students can receive college credits for free. This is an historic example of legislation that other States and the Federal government are considering.
Fourth, Nursing is one of our stellar programs and recently obtained reaccreditation. The School of Nursing was reaccredited in 2020 and our nursing graduates continue to excel nationally (94%) in testing outcomes of the nursing licensure exam, NCLEX. The University continues to provide stellar nurses for this community, and they, along with many others, have been on the front lines, taking risks and serving people during this COVID challenge. We would like to expand the program and train more nurses, but faculty resources and clinical sites continue to stand in the way of this goal.

Fifth, our newly formed School of Agriculture is up and running and making important contributions. There is now in place a Certificate program that students and farmers can take advantage of, and Associate and Bachelor degree programs should be approved soon. We have been fortunate to hire some outstanding faculty and Dean Usman Adamu has been coordinating this effort in an inclusive and thoughtful manner.

Finally, though not one of the topics mentioned in my invitation letter, I do want to update the Senate on how we are operating. Though in the Fall our classes were exclusively remote and we only had 11 nursing students living on campus because they had to in order to fulfill their clinical requirements, we now have 94 students living in the residence halls on the Orville E. Kean Campus on St. Thomas and 24 students on the Albert A. Sheen Campus on St. Croix. Though the vast majority of our classes are still remote, the latest schedule I reviewed included over 70 in-person classes and a significant amount that are hybrid, which includes some in-person sessions and some sessions via Zoom. We are committed to fulfilling our mission in a safe and thoughtful manner. Though we are not quite back to normal operations, we are moving in that direction. With the continuing support of this body and the Governor, we are confident that we will return to and exceed our former levels.

Thank you for this opportunity and I look forward to your questions.