Good afternoon Honorable Senator Genevieve Whitaker, members of the Committee on Education and Workforce Development and other members of the 34th Legislature of the Virgin Islands, fellow testifiers, and members of the viewing and listening audience. The members of the Virgin Islands Board for Career and Technical Education (VIBCTE) thank you for the opportunity to testify before your Committee. My name is Dr. Anastasie Jackson, Board Vice-Chair. Today, I have the awesome responsibility of reading VIBCTE’s testimony to all of you on the record, in the absence of Dr. Michael Francois, VIBCTE Board Chair. Joining me here today are Board Secretary Dr. Suzanne Darrow-Magras and Executive Director Anton Doos.

Critical to our mission as Board members of VIBCTE is the mandate that employability skills, both academic and technical, be provided to all students in the Virgin Islands, regardless of their plan to attend college and/or enter the workforce directly after high school. Teachers and students must also be provided with the proper resources required to keep up with the rapidly evolving changes in Career and Technical Education across the globe. Today’s testimony will include various functions and responsibilities of the CTE Board, highlights of Board accomplishments, the Board’s work regarding schools reopening during COVID-19, as well as an overview of the challenges the Board faces.

The CTE Board was established in 1957 in the VI Code, Title 17, Chapter 23, Subchapter 262. “The Virgin Islands Board for Career and Technical Education shall be the sole agency for the administration of the career and technical programs in the Virgin Islands under this subchapter and the Acts of Congress referred to in section 261 of this title and shall—." The law goes into 12 sections, which the Board consolidated as follows:

- Cooperation with all stakeholders as it relates to CTE and provide certification for all schools in the field of CTE while administering all provisions of the code.
- Cooperate with federal government agencies in all phases of CTE.
- Administer both local, as well as federal funds for the promotion of CTE.
- Approve plans for CTE as an integral part of the VI and aid in the preparation of subject matter teachers.
- Certify payment of federal Acts relating to CTE programs from funds appropriated for this purpose.
- Provide for research relating to CTE.
- Promote, maintain, and aid in establishing schools, provide for certification, determine salaries and appointments of teachers.
- Determine the qualifications of persons who are training in CTE and articulate with other territorial programs.
- Do all things necessary to receive all federal funds appropriated to the VI under this Code.
- Issue rules and regulations for the proper administration of this Subchapter, and
- Prepare an annual budget and reports to the Legislature.

A complete copy of the Code is conveniently posted on our website (www.victeb.org).

The CTE Board consists of 7 members: 4 members from the island of St. Croix, Chairman, Dr. Michael Francois, Vice-Chair, Dr. Anastasie Jackson, Teacher Certification Chair, Ms. Jo Murphy, and the Honorable Senator Genevieve Whitaker, Scholarship Chair. The 2 members from the island of St. Thomas are Secretary Dr. Suzanne Darrow-Magras, and Treasurer, Ms. Jenny Hawkes; from the island of St. John is Public Relations chair, Mr. Ronnie Jones. State Director Nancy Callwood, Office of Career, Technical & Adult Education is an ex-officio member. Presently we are short 2 of the 9-member Governor-appointed Board members as mandated by the VI Code. The Board is a territorial one, and serves both districts with a staff of 4, including Executive Director, Mr. Anton Doos.

CTE members set their goals extremely high for the first year as a functioning Board. Although the pandemic had its effect on direct interaction with administrators, instructors, and students, we still managed to accomplish many of our goals. We have, for the first time since the Board’s inception, created By-Laws, by which the Board is governed. The Board successfully issued $10,000 in scholarships to 12 students in both districts and recognized the top CTE students in the territory. The Board, through the Division of Personnel, provided Interpersonal Communication and Resolution Training to district State and school administrators, CTE Board members and staff. Board members supported the office when the existing Director retired. Mr. Anton Doos was hired to fill the position of Executive Director, a position which was vacant for 8 months.

The Board website is functioning, having been updated for full instructor interaction and document submission, making the certification experience easier. The Board also revised the Teacher Certification Manual which is now available as a download on our site. To date, 29 teachers have attained certification. In addition, information and the Zoom link to our monthly public Board meetings are always posted.

Several Board members attended the virtual Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) conference and learned new ideas to further develop existing local programs. We partnered with other local agencies, holding meaningful dialog with the VI Department of Education, the VI Board of Education and the American Federation of Teachers.

The CTE Board, as well as many of our partner agencies, are eagerly awaiting the reopening of schools for 2nd year CTE students. To that end, the Board toured CTE classrooms in both districts in January 2021, to assess readiness, and are optimistic that our capable CTE instructors will soon engage students in in-person and hands-on learning. The Board is committed to transparency as well as accessibility to our community of instructors. We engaged in virtual
instructor meetings in September 2020, to learn firsthand of concerns and challenges. The Board saw the need for CTE online teaching materials and other resources and sprang into action, helping the Cosmetology, Aviation and Automotive Electronic programs, territory wide.

The Board also faces various challenges. The VI Code mandates the Board’s oversight of all federal CTE funding, yet this is not in effect. The Board is also mandated to participate in all phases of CTE programs, approve plans for the promotion of CTE as an essential and integral part of the public school system in the Virgin Islands, and provide for the preparation of Instructors in such subjects. We are working on improving this level of involvement.

The Board is keenly aware of the instructor shortage that plagues CTE programs. We know that salaries are a major issue, among others, and we are working to address those challenges in collaboration with partner agencies. The Board invites the Committee to collaborate in finding and identifying workable solutions.

The territory’s CTE curricula needs reviewing and updating. As the global economy evolves, so should our programs. As a result, we are exploring new programs and curricula to fill emerging opportunities. Other challenges include accessing hard CTE data, the inability of the Board to enforce instructor certification rules and most of all, the person to person contact and interaction that COVID-19 has robbed us of.

The Board will continue its work on previously discussed goals as well as new goals to include establishing a teacher certification/credentialing system, supporting teacher certification courses, and exploring instructor financial assistance for required course work. We will also continue to increase our visibility and communication efforts.

Thank you, Madam Chair, for involving VIBCTE in the Legislative decision-making process on Education and Workforce Development, an area that heavily impacts CTE in the Virgin Islands. To conclude, the CTE Board wishes all a happy Black History and CTE month. My team and I are prepared to answer any questions you may have for us at this time.

Respectfully submitted,

Anastasie Jackson
Vice-chair
For Chairman Dr. Michael Francois
Virgin Islands Board for Career and Technical Education