INTRODUCTION

Good Morning, Senator Genevieve Whitaker, Chairman of the 34th Legislature of the Virgin Islands Committee on Education and Workforce Development, committee members, all other senators, other presenters, and the listening and viewing public. I am Kyza A. Callwood, Chairperson of the 20th Virgin Islands Board of Education. I am here to offer testimony on the various functions and responsibilities of the Board, the status of scholarships and grants, highlight any board accomplishments, the Board’s work regarding the reopening of schools during COVID-19, and an overview of the challenges the Board currently faces.

I must state that the Board wanted to decline this invitation because the Board is only one-month post-swearing-in and still in the organizational phase. We also wanted to be productive, relevant and engaged in the Committee on Education and Workforce Development process. Having said as much, in the spirit of cooperation and collaboration, we are here, accounted for and ready to contribute and participate fully.

The 20th Virgin Islands Board of Education is comprised of nine members. Our St. Thomas district members are yours truly, Judy M. Gomez, Esq., Jeanette Smith-Barry, and Nandi Sekou, Esq. Angel Bolques, Jr. is our at-large member from the island of St. John. Our St. Croix District members are Winona A. Hendricks, Terrence T. Joseph, Shawna K. Richards, and Emmanuella M. Perez-Cassius.

Accompanying me today remotely are Vice-Chairperson Winona A. Hendricks, Board Secretary, Shawna K. Richards, School Plants and Facilities Chair, Emmanuella Perez-Cassius, Associate Executive Director, Emmett Hansen, Director of Business and Finance, Alcenta DeWindt, and Sylvanie Rhymer, Financial Aid Supervisor.

BOARD’S FUNCTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Title 17 of the Virgin Islands Code sections (21 – 23, 41 – 42, 82, 90- 91, 121, 127 – 129, 171 – 177, 184 – 191 and 193 – 194) charges the VIBE with the responsibility for the general policy and direction of public education in the Virgin Islands. VIBE is granted the authority and charged with the following functions (not all inclusive):

❖ Administer and oversee the Territorial Scholarship/Loan program, Special Legislative Grants and Federal Funds issued or awarded to the V.I. Department of Education.

❖ Certification of Education Professionals employed by the Department of Education.

❖ Initiation and revision of educational policies.
❖ Oversight of school plants, facilities and environmental compliance and;

❖ Mediate and hear appeals of decisions of the Department of Education and complains concerning all educational and school matters

Pursuant to the by-laws of the 20th Virgin Islands Board of Education, these duties are further delineated and executed through the specific roles, and responsibilities of each of its five (5) standing committees and two (2) ad-hoc committees. The committees meet at regular intervals to ensure the mandates under Title 17 are executed and the needs of the education system, students, teachers, parents, and our educational stakeholders are addressed.

On Saturday, January 16, 2021, the Board, through its chairman, announced the following appointments to the Board’s standing committees, ad-hoc Committees, and advisory Committees as approved by a majority of members.

**Professional Staff Certification and Higher Education**

❖ Reviews the credentials of professional staff to ensure each candidate is qualified for certification in accordance to the Board’s policies

❖ Sponsors courses and workshops that provide materials for professional staff applicants seeking certification

Jeanette Smith Barry – Chair (jsmithbarry@myviboe.com)
Members: Judy M. Gomez, Winona A. Hendricks, Angel L. Bolques, Jr.

**School Plants and Facilities**

❖ Oversees all Department of Education buildings inclusive of all schools and administrative office buildings in the Territory

❖ Conducts regular site visits to provide recommendations for repairs and improvements.

Emmanuella Perez-Cassius – Chair (epcassius@myviboe.com)
Public/Private Liaison

❖ Identifies strategies to engage the community and education stakeholders in the Board’s programs

❖ Forms partnerships with the private sector to promote the goals and visions of the board through activities such as radio appearances and town hall meeting

Angel L. Bolques, Jr. – Chair (abolques@myviboe.com)
Members: Terrence T. Joseph, Emmanuella M. Perez-Cassius, Jeanette Smith Barry

Policies, Rules, and Regulations

❖ Researches and writes all school policies

❖ Drafts policies for committee’s review, provide for public comment and full Board approval

Winona A. Hendricks – Chair (wahendricks@myviboe.com)
Members: Terrence T. Joseph, Shawna K. Richards, and Kyza A. Callwood

Finance Committee - Scholarship and Collections (NEW)

❖ Advise the Board on executing awards policies for undergraduate and graduate programs

❖ Develop, review, and recommend for consideration by the Board, policies and regulations concerning scholarship awards criteria and application procedures

❖ Monitor labor trends and recommend amendments to legislation concerning scholarships

❖ Develop, review, and recommend policies, procedures and regulations concerning loan applications, awards, and debt collections

❖ Review scholarship applications and recommend candidates to receive scholarships and loans

Shawna K. Richards – Chair (srichards@myviboe.com)
Members: Judy M. Gomez, Jeanette Smith Barry
Internal Control Ad-Hoc Committee (NEW)

In conjunction with the Executive Director, serve as the Board's liaison with the Office of the Inspector General and or all other public or private auditors approved by the Board. However, the Executive Director shall have primary responsibility to interface with the Office of the Inspector General.

Conduct investigations and hearings and recommend decisions to the Board pertaining to ethics violations, labor relations, and Human Resources issues, pursuant to VIBE's By-laws, and policies and in accordance with federal and territorial laws.

- Develop, review, and recommend for consideration by the Board due process procedures, standards, and guidelines for considering employee and Board member grievances and complaints
- Develop, review, and recommend for consideration by the Board, VIBE operational guidelines, labor relations and Human Resources policies.
- Develop, review, and recommend for consideration by the Board all policies related to conducting internal audits and internal controls.
- Monitor corrective action plans implemented in response to external audits and reviews conducted by any government or private agency.
- Recommend requests for public and/or private audits.
- Review audit reports and prepare corrective action plans in response to external audits.

Judy M. Gomez, Esq. – Chair (jmgomez@myviboe.com)
Members: Kyza A. Callwood, Emmanuella M. Perez-Cassius,

Legislative Liaison Ad-Hoc Committee (NEW)

- Draft and update a legislative agenda for consideration and approval by the Board.
- Coordinate with Board committees regarding recommendations for legislative revisions.
- Coordinate relations between the Board and the Virgin Islands Legislature.
❖ Draft positions on proposed legislation for consideration and approval by the Board, as needed

❖ Monitor and provide recommendations for code compliance.

❖ Coordinate the timely preparation and submittal of reports to the Legislature.

Nandi Sekou, Esq. – Chair (nsekou@myviboe.com)
Members: Terrence T. Joseph and Shawna K. Richards

Executive Committee

❖ Provide oversight of the budget development process and conduct budget-based program reviews in conjunction with the Director of Business and Finance.

❖ Develop, review, and recommend changes to the Virgin Islands Code concerning Board operations and finances.

❖ Supervise the Executive Director to assure the acts of the Board are executed, and it keeps the members informed of issues on the local and national level.

Kyza A. Callwood, Chair (kcallwood@myviboe.com)
Members: Winona A. Hendricks, Vice-Chair and Shawna K. Richards, Secretary

VIDE’s Strategic Planning Steering Committee

❖ The Strategic Planning Steering Committee’s is made up of hired, elected, and appointed leaders and business owners. Members of this committee provide recommendations for the Department’s strategic direction and transformation over the next five years.

Member Kyza A. Callwood

VIDE’s Community Council

❖ This council is a microcosm of the community as it is made up of all members of the VI community including educators, students, parents, elected and government officials, business leaders, spiritual leaders, community activists, and more. The council is essential to helping the Department achieve its goal of restoring and rebuilding community trust.

Member: Shawna K. Richards
VIDE’s New Schools Construction Advisory Board

❖ The New Schools Construction Advisory Board will guide the planning and development of better facilities and learning environments designed to facilitate the districts’ and the community’s desired learning experiences for our students.

Member: Nandi Sekou, Esq. – STT District
Member: Terrence T. Joseph – STX District

VIDE’s Curriculum Council

❖ This curriculum council is a governing body established to determine policy, monitor, support, and guide all things related to curriculum development. Key to the responsibility of the council is the alignment of standards, instructional strategies, learning experiences, and assessment.

Member: Winona A. Hendricks

VIDE’s Curriculum Design Team

❖ The Collaborative Design Team (CDT) was established on February 4, 2020 based on the premise that curriculum is the "Heartbeat" of the department; it is not solely the responsibility of Curriculum & Instruction. Different perspectives are required to move the work of Curriculum and Instruction forward. The goal is for all entities within VIDE to embrace the vision, mission, values, and goals, and address all matters pertaining to curriculum to include academic standards, instructional resources, personnel, management, budget, IT, etc.

Member: Emmanuella M. Perez- Cassius

WTJX – Virgin Islands Broadcasting System (Title 30 VIC, Chapter 7, Subsection 201)
Member Kyza A. Callwood

University of the Virgin Islands Board of Trustees - (Title 17 VIC, Chapter 33, Subsection 455)
Member Kyza A. Callwood

Morris F. de Castro Fellowship Board (Title 17 VIC, Chapter 15, Subsection 190)
Member Kyza A. Callwood

Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast & Islands (REL-NEI)
Member: Winona A. Hendricks
The theme “Collective Aspirations, Measurable Achievements,” selected for the tenure of 20th Board of Education, is a unification tool developed to create a template of excellence for the future to follow and hopefully emulate. As a board, members took an oath to serve, and we must strive to revitalize our educational system with new, creative, and innovative ideas. Collectively, this requires thinking outside of the box. I must share that this perspective is at the forefront of the 20th Board of Education and we will do whatever is necessary to ensure we have an educational system that is new and improved in order to allow our students to be prepared in the 21st Century.

**STATUS OF SCHOLARSHIPS & GRANTS**

The 2020 Financial Aid process began in January of the same year with a deadline date of April 20, 2020. Due to the COVID-19 Virus, the scholarship deadline was extended to April 30, 2020. Some complaints were received of applicants not reaching the office, which led to a further extension of the deadline to May 18, 2020. Applications were available on our website www.myviboe.com for completion. Paper applications were also available for distribution to the public in the St. Thomas and St. Croix Office. As mandated by the Virgin Islands Code, an advertisement of the scholarships was placed in the Virgin Islands Daily News and the St. Croix Avis for one (1) week. The information was also available on our website.

Staff members presented workshops in the St. Thomas/St. John District at the local and private high schools: Ivanna Eudora Kean, Charlotte Amalie, Adult Continuing Education, All Saints Cathedral School, Saints Peters & Paul Catholic School, Seventh-Day Adventist School, VI Montessori/Peter Gruber International, Antilles School, and Gifft Hill School on St. John. Other workshops were presented at the University of the Virgin Islands Upward Bound Program and the Rising Star Steel Orchestra Youth Program on St. Thomas.

On St. Croix, the staff conducted workshops at St. Croix Educational Complex, St. Croix Central High School, St. Croix Seventh Day School, Free Will Baptiste, St. Joseph High School, Good Hope/Country Day School, and Adult Secondary Education.

A total of 597 applications were received and presented to the Board for review and selection of various scholarship awards, including Special Legislative Grants, In-Service Training Grants, Nursing Grants, General Major Grants, and Territorial Loan/Grants. After the Financial Aid selection process on June 11, 2020, Financial Aid Representatives compiled a list of the Special Legislative Scholarship Recipients. The awardees were announced on WTJX June 22, 2020.

Typically, the financial aid process would be completed in September; however, with the COVID pandemic, additional time was granted to applicants to submit documents for processing. Dissemination of disclosure statements began in July and ended in October.
### Financial Aid Award Breakdown for the Academic Year 2019-2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scholarship Awarded</th>
<th>Recipients</th>
<th>Total Awarded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Territorial Scholarships</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>$665,800.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-Service Training Grant</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>$10,400.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Legislative Grants</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>$165,400.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing Scholarship</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>$170,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Scholarship</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>$200,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valedictorian &amp; Salutatorian</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>$65,400.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morris F. de Castro</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>$90,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of the Virgin Islands</td>
<td></td>
<td>$30,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>478</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1,397,000.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Special Legislative Scholarships Unexpended

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Special Legislative Scholarships</th>
<th>Budget Available</th>
<th>Amount Unexpended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exceptional Children</td>
<td>$4,000.00</td>
<td>$2,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virgin Islands National Guard</td>
<td>$2,000.00</td>
<td>$2,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilda Bastian</td>
<td>$10,000.00</td>
<td>$5,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music St. Thomas/St. John</td>
<td>$8,000.00</td>
<td>$2,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music St. Croix</td>
<td>$8,000.00</td>
<td>$4,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lew Muckle</td>
<td>$12,000.00</td>
<td>$3,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann Schrader</td>
<td>$2,400.00</td>
<td>$1,200.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amadeo Francis</td>
<td>$10,000.00</td>
<td>$2,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter I.M. Hodge</td>
<td>$10,000.00</td>
<td>$2,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurse Grants</td>
<td>$200,000.00</td>
<td>$30,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Unexpended</strong></td>
<td><strong>$266,400.00</strong></td>
<td><strong>$53,200.00</strong></td>
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</table>
INELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>APPLICANTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete - No response</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low GPA</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time Status</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Registered</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awards Declined</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2020 Coronavirus Scholarship

The Following is the breakdown of the two hundred and eighty (280) applicants who applied.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FORMAT</th>
<th>ST. THOMAS</th>
<th>ST. JOHN</th>
<th>ST. CROIX</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PAPER APPLICATIONS</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ON-LINE APPLICATIONS</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>196</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRAND TOTAL</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>280</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus far one hundred and thirty-seven (137) signed agreements were received from students for processing. Of that number, one hundred and thirteen (133) agreements have been submitted to OMB.

VIBE has received seventy (70) checks thus far from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

2021 Financial Aid Process

The Virgin Islands Board of Education is pleased to announce that we have begun our 2021 Financial Aid Process with an application deadline date of April 23, 2021. We are conducting radio interviews and virtual presentations in the months following to educate the public on the process. All individuals seeking financial aid assistance should apply either via paper, which can be picked up at our offices in both districts or online by visiting myviboe.com and clicking on Financial Aid and click Apply for Financial Aid from the dropdown menu.

To be eligible for financial aid, students must fulfill the following requirements:
Must be a US Virgin Islands resident
Must be a graduate from a high school in the US Virgin Islands or have proof of three (3) years residence in the US Virgin Islands
Must have a minimum cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 2.0 or a 2.5 GPA for Nursing
Must be accepted by and enrolled in an accredited institution
Must be attending school full-time

Supporting Documents Needed

- Official high school transcript and acceptance letter for first-time applicants
- Official college or university transcript for continuing and graduate students
- Letter of recommendation from department head or supervisor for In-Service Training Grant applicants

SCHOOL REOPENING

On January 13, 2021, the Virgin Islands Department of Education provided the Virgin Islands Board of Education with a letter that outlined the implementation of its Hybrid Plan gradually, between February and March 2021. Students in grades PreK-3rd, students with special needs, and Career and Technical Education students will return for in-person instruction, once their schools have been outfitted with the necessary fixtures that deem them safe to reopen (as defined under Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines). The Hybrid Plan also mandates students in grades 4-12 continuing to learn from home.

On January 20, 2021, the Virgin Islands Board of Education sent an email correspondence to the Virgin Islands Department of Education through Commissioner Berry-Benjamin. This email requested several documents from the Department of Education to include:

- A copy of each school's reopening timeline and status individually listed by district and school level. Ex. Elementary, Jr. High, & High school. This timeline should include a list of all school facilities scheduled for in-person usage, the percentage of schools completed and ready for reopening, all COVID installations and upgrade status on supplies and estimated receipt of such supplies, and the 2020 repair completion report.
- An update on all US Department of Education, US House of Representatives, and US Department issued COVID-19 funding and spending report. A Report on CARES act funding and spending as well as repair projects tackled with federal funding was also requested.
❖ The 2021 plan and budget for future capital and maintenance projects, including rebuilding and infrastructure remodeling projects.

❖ Copies of all reports for the 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 school year provided to VIDE from DPNR, DPW, Department of Health, Environmental Health, VI Fire Service, and OSHA that ensure reopening environmentally safe for students and staff.

On January 25, 2021, the Virgin Islands Department of Education responded to the Board's inquiry of information with several supporting documents and informed us that with respect to its request for Environmental Reports from the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, the Department of Labor (OSHA), the Department of Health, Environmental Health, as well as other agencies, these agencies "are not determining factors at this time" and that "the Department of Health is charged with examining and approving the reopening of schools."

On February 1, 2021, VIBE responded to VIDE, indicating that their response overlooks the Board's authority to make the final decision to certify the reopening of schools based on a comprehensive report of all environmental factors. VIBE further referred them to Virgin Islands Code, Title 17, Section 24(a)(2)(b), which authorizes the Board to make decisions to annually certify the reopening of schools in conjunction with the Department of Health-Environmental Division, the Department of Labor (OSHA) and the Department of Planning and Natural Resources.

Also, Section 24(a)(3) authorizes the Board to utilize the agencies mentioned earlier, (the Department of Public Works and the Virgin Islands Fire Service), to carry out its obligations under Section 24. In that same letter of response, VIBE indicated that the purpose of these provisions is to ensure the schools are environmentally sound before students, teachers, and staff are allowed to occupy the school campuses. Also, to execute the mandate prescribed in Section 24, the Board must be provided the reports from these agencies that indicate all schools were inspected for environmental and safety concerns and the results of those inspections. The fact that the COVID-19 Pandemic has caused the delay in the reopening of schools does not obviate the need for the environmental reports and certification by the Board.

On February 8, 2021, the Virgin Islands Board of Education conducted a tour of the St. Croix district to verify and validate the St. Croix district's progress as it relates to the reopening of schools. To date, all of our schools have received banners, health, and safety signage, touchless dispensers, teacher desk partitions, marked our floors to indicate 6feet distancing, installed wash stations, touchless water fountains, distributed thermometers, and have procured other resources deemed necessary for reopening of schools. As of submission of this testimony, the Board is awaiting documentation from the requisite agencies to certify the readiness of schools. This documentation, among other important factors, will help the Board determine its position and fully control our authority.
VIBE ACCOMPLISHMENTS & CHALLENGES

The 20th Virgin Islands Board of Education has only been in existence for roughly a month; however, that is not to say that we have not hit the ground running. The VIBE has already collaborated with the Virgin Islands Department of Education and met on February 4, 2020. In that meeting, we discussed several items to facilitate the collaboration and air of cooperation between the V.I. Board of Education and the V.I. Department of Education. The agenda items included the following below:

1. Roles and Responsibilities of Board members and VIDE Senior Staff
2. Communication Protocol between both Entities
3. Requesting Information/Data from the VIDE
4. Certification of Teachers and the TRIP Program
5. Teacher Certification Hours (Breaking Down)
6. Graduation (Required Courses)
7. Promotional Policy (7th & 8th Grades)
8. Averaging Grades (Promotional Subjects vs. Overall)
9. Diploma (Offering more than one option to students)
10. Curriculum Framework
11. Notice of Board Meetings
12. Federal Grants Overview

As you can see, both the 20th Virgin Islands Board of Education and the Virgin Islands Department of Education are making a concerted effort to work hand in hand to deliver the best public education possible for the children of the Virgin Islands.

The VIBE is approaching completion of the installation of a generator at our Dronningens Gade facility on St. Thomas. As you are all aware, the electricity situation Territory-wide has been tenuous, but the work of the VIBE must continue regardless. After being displaced by Hurricane Maria and occupying a temporary location, our St. Croix Office has permanently moved to offices located on Strand Street, Christiansted.

Our committees have begun meeting and are functioning well. Currently, they are working on both short and long-term goals and plans. This especially bodes well for the work of the VIBE as the full board is driven by what comes out of our committees. In fact, on February 19 – 21, 2021, the VIBE will be meeting to work on our strategic plan, which is integral to our success in crafting a sound and achievable plan.

However, despite this new and promising collaboration with the VIDE, the VIBE still faces challenges.
Our St. Thomas headquarters is experiencing roof leakage; however, we are working with the Department of Public Works to have this repaired by the contractor who did the work. We anticipate having this accomplished by the end of this quarter.

Our next challenge is the renovation and restoration of the Guirty House, also located on our Dronningens office site. When completed, this building will serve as our fully ADA-compliant conference room. We want to thank this body for listening to our pleas and providing the funding for this worthy project. We anticipate work to begin in the second quarter of this year, with completion prior to the end of the calendar year.

The fluidity of the COVID-19 pandemic mandates proved extremely challenging in setting policies for the VIDE to follow. However, given the new level of communication and more precise protocols between the VIDE and the VIBE, we are more confident in the quality of the information provided to us and in the ability of all stakeholders to not only keeping our children safe but also in maintaining and improving the quality of their educational instruction.

The greatest challenge has been the receipt of funds - especially for scholarship checks to our awardees. There are several factors involved, both internal and external. However, please know that the VIBE is putting the board and administration's full attention toward changing this dynamic and improving the process.

**CONCLUSION**

Senator Whitaker, Education and Workforce Committee members, other members of the body, and those watching and listening, this concludes our testimony, and we stand ready to respond to questions posed from this august body. Again, thank you for the invitation, and we look forward to this collaborative year.