March 8, 2021

Honorable Senator Genevieve R. Whitaker
Chairwoman
Committee on Education and Workforce Development
#3022 Estate Golden Rock
Christiansted, St. Croix,
United States Virgin Islands 00820

Re: Written Testimony of the Virgin Islands Board of Career and Technical Education for March 15, 2021
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 Virgin Islands Board for Career and Technical Education (VIBCTE) members thank you for the opportunity to testify before your Committee. My name is Dr. Michael T. François, Board Chair.

Joining me here today is Board 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 whether the goal is to attend college or enter the workforce directly after high school. Today's testimony will include the status of Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, an outline of the CTE curriculum, and an overview of the teacher certification process.

Recently, VIBCTE had an opportunity to visit the CTE classrooms, both on St. Croix and St. Thomas. Our conclusion of the tour was that the CTE classrooms in the territory lack basic upkeep, to say the least. On St. Croix, the Central High School (CHS) braiding and nail technician class has resumed classroom learning. However, the classroom leaves much to be desired. This classroom, on our visit, had exposed and stripped wiring, leaks, and a lack of basic maintenance. Furthermore, the equipment in the classroom was outdated. Both the environment and equipment place our students at a learning disadvantage while being subjected to health and safety hazards. The Career and Technical Center (CTEC) has nine (9) programs that resumed classroom learning.

Although the classrooms at CTEC are in workable condition, they are also in need of basic upkeep. For example, there are missing ceiling tiles, leaks, and outdated equipment. On St. Thomas, the situation was worse. If I had to describe the St. Thomas CTE classrooms in one word, that word would be deplorable. At the Charlotte Amile High
School (CAHS), we found classrooms that consistently flood, a culinary lab missing basic sanitary requirements set by the Department of Health (DOH), and buildings with mold in plain sight. The bottom line is such an environment is unsafe and unhealthy for our students. Why, after years and millions in federal funding, this has not been remedied is baffling, especially when modular units for academic teaching have been provided. Several years ago, the VIBCTE suggested in just such a hearing, legislation that would move funding from DOE to the VIBCTE for CTE classrooms’ upkeep. It also bears mentioning that the VIBCTE, by law, VI Code, Title 17, Chapter 23, Sub-chapter 262, is charged with determining Instructors' salaries and appointments. Perhaps this is one of the many stumbling blocks in filling the vacant CTE Instructor positions in the territory, namely just at CTEC for A/C Repair, Drafting, Small Engine Repair, Plumbing, Automobile Repair, and Upholstery.

Regarding the CTE curriculum, Career & Technical Education (CTE) is a program of study that prepares Virgin Islands students for real-world knowledge, college, and careers through a multi-year sequence of courses that integrate both core academics with technical skills within a career pathway. Many CTE courses are offered in both territorial districts, resulting in national certification such as the National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER) and National Academies Foundations (NAF). VIBCTE is tasked with the review and approval of curricula for 16 career clusters. Exposure to these clusters, including careers students may not be familiar with or may not ever have considered, will produce the next generation of leaders and entrepreneurs in the Virgin Islands. CTE allows students to figure out what they are passionate about, what they love to do, and what they would like to try. CTE gives learning a boost. It combines regular academic course curricula with career-focused courses, skill-building, mentoring, and on-the-job training with real-life experience through internships. This experience helps students build confidence and leadership skills to meet their goals in and out of the classroom. CTE programs provide information on the various postsecondary options available in their community,
When young people develop valuable skills, make connections, and build a network while they are in high school, they have an inside track to a successful career.

The first step in an individual getting certified by the board is to determine his or her eligibility. The individual should have a Bachelor of Arts degree, Bachelor of Science degree, Trade certificate, or Apprenticeship in their field. This requirement is set by the Virgin Islands Board of Education (VIBE) and enforced by the VI Department of Education (VIDE) through the Division of Personnel. It is preferred if the individual is pre-qualified by HR and DOE, but it is not required. Second, the candidate must complete the VIBCTE application. They must provide proof of citizenship and education with supporting documents, certificates, transcripts, and other proof to support qualifications. If the applicant is applying for a renewal of certification, they should include any additional coursework completed as part of the education requirement. The individual can complete the first two steps by visiting our offices on St. Thomas and St. Croix or online at www.victeb.org.

Once the office receives the application and supporting documents, they are reviewed by the office staff, sorted, labeled for priority, and loaded to the cloud if requirements are met. The Certification committee members individually review the candidates' information as soon as they are available. The applications are further analyzed at the teacher certification meeting, which occurs monthly. The team then decides as to certification eligibility. Instructors are prioritized by first-time applicants, renewals of temporary or provisional certificates, and renewals of expired certificates. Presently, on St. Croix, there are 30 instructors certified and 26 not certified. On St. Thomas, there are 17 certified, with 41 not certified. This is a total of 47 certified CTE instructors and 67 not certified in the Territory (41% certified, 59% not certified). Twenty-one (21) of the 67 not certified had their instructor certification expire in December 2020. Approximately 10 of the 21 are on hold for additional information, and the rest are being notified of their status and hopefully will respond and complete the application.
for certification. This board has certified 35 instructors so far, and we are also in the process of certifying the Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC) instructors in the Territory. We are actively exploring ways to improve the teacher credentialing process, including establishing an automatic instructor notification system to ensure certification does not lapse. VIBCTE is in the process of developing a protocol for certifying licensed contractors, as well as being in conversation with agency partners to improve accountability and ensure students have optimal instructional experiences.

Madam Chair, this concludes my testimony; thank you for allowing the CTE board the opportunity to testify. We are prepared to answer questions you may have for us.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Michael T. Francois
Chairman
Virgin Islands Board of Career and Technical Education