Mr. Chairman, members of the 34th Legislature’s Committee on Housing, Transportation and Telecommunications, senators, legislative staff, ladies and gentlemen, I am Tom Bolt, Counsel for Liberty Mobile USVI Inc. It is always a pleasure to appear before this Committee as I have been quite active over the past 30+ years in the areas of jurisdiction for the Committee. This evening we are discussing the implementation of 5G Technology in the Territory.

One of the most important elements relative to 5G in the U.S. Virgin Islands, is that it is here today utilizing existing infrastructure and spectrum. This evening we will learn that a majority of Liberty Mobile USVI customers currently have access to 5G technology and that while small cell technology facilitates additional coverage, it is independent of 5G technology.

This past year and in this 34th Legislature, Senator Sarauw introduced Bill No. 34-0021 earlier this month to among other elements attempt to regulate mobile telecommunication service quality in the Territory. While it also addresses regulation of WAPA by the PSC we take no position on this aspect of the legislation.

As has be noted in the past, the Federal Communications Commission preempts regulation of mobile telecommunication service quality by state, territorial and local governments. In the preamble to Bill No. 34-0021, the sponsor cites poor connectivity, dead zones and an increase in dropped calls after Hurricanes Irma and Maria. The proposed legislation further states that there is no regulatory authority to accept complaints from wireless telecommunications consumers.

As to the first premise, that is what we are here to discuss tonight, the full implementation of 5G in the Territory and adoption of small cell technology in the Territory. As to the second, the Virgin Islands Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs through its office of General Counsel does an excellent job in handling consumer complaints from wireless telecommunications consumers.

What needs to happen to advance telecommunications in the Territory is to foster a collaborative environment. Certain senators have contacted me on multiple occasions relative to service on the west end of St. Thomas in Estates Fortuna and Bordeaux. This service will not be remedied by our PSC which as I have noted is preempted from regulating mobile telecommunications service quality in the Territory. But it will be remedied if we can secure a lease with the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority for space where a cell tower is currently located to increase its height slightly. Liberty Mobile USVI and its predecessor in interest AT&T Mobility USVI have been trying for almost two years to secure this lease which will benefit FirstNet that provides enhanced service to our Virgin Islands first responders. We have been told that Property & Procurement supports the lease, but that it has not
been designated as a priority. If the public health, safety and welfare of Virgin Islanders is not a priority, nothing is.

Another area that is in need of enhanced service is Coral Bay. We have identified a 5 acre plot that we can utilize with WAPA and have sent a survey to our Department of Property & Procurement delineating the area that WAPA has identified and the area that Liberty Mobile USVI needs. We would appreciate any assistance that this Committee and its members may offer to address the needs of the Coral Bay community.

There are a number of cell sites that have been identified on St. Croix that will address the issues of connectivity, dead zones and dropped calls. Victor Vera, Liberty Mobile USVI’s Director of RAN Engineering will be able to discuss these enhancement tonight.

Finally, Small Cell Technology is a key element to enhance service in the Territory which our CEO, Naji Khoury, Victor Vera and some of tonight’s other speakers will address. It is my sincere hope that this Legislature and other Government entities can be less confrontation or collaborative with mobile telecommunication providers in the Territory.

For the future of our islands, promoting connectivity, online education, tele-medicine and advanced technology which the people of the Virgin Islands expect, that our tourism sector demands – it is critical that we put aside differences of opinion and work together.

At this time, I would like to introduce our CEO, Naji Khoury. Mr. Khoury is a different type of executive that we not seen as much of as we would like. He is committed to working with the U.S. Virgin Islands, the members of this Legislature, other branches of our local government and our people. I have found he to be a refreshing change to work with and believe that you will too. Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, I introduce Naji Khoury, CEO of Liberty Mobile USVI Inc.