

Statement of
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Nominee for the Position of
Executive Director of the
Virgin Islands Public Services Commission
Before the Committee on Rules and Judiciary
Legislature of the Virgin Islands of the United States

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Good morning. Honorable Chairwoman Diane T. Capehart, Honorable Senators of the 35th Legislature, and Members of the Rules and Judiciary Committee, it is a privilege and an honor to come before you today. I am grateful for the invitation to appear before this distinguished Committee.

I am joined today, here in the St. Croix and the St. Thomas chambers, by my daughter, Jendayi Setorie-Collingwood, loved ones, family, close friends, my work family, and supporters.

I am honored and deeply appreciative to the chairman and members of the Virgin Islands Public Services Commission (PSC, Commission) for their recommendation and to the Honorable Governor Albert Bryan Jr. for his nomination of me to serve as the Executive Director of the Public Service Commission.

The opportunity and experience to serve as Executive Director is humbling. This mission requires a leader with a critical mandate with dual responsibility to serve Virgin Islanders and our visitors, as well as to ensure the viability of the power generators, potable water producers, telecommunications providers, solid waste and wastewater servicers, and ferry transportation providers, that we regulate.

Madam Chair and members of this committee, I first bring you greetings and gratitude from my gracious and remarkable family and loved ones near and far, and also from our esteemed staff and members at the Virgin Islands Public Services Commission.

My personal history is deeply forged with the links and chains of our shared ancestral Virgin Islands, Caribbean and American history.

My Great Grandmother, Augusta Evangeline Rhymer Hall Leerdam, migrated to St. Thomas from her birth land of Virgin Gorda in the British Virgin Islands. She gave birth on St. Thomas to one son, Alturo Hall, and two daughters Adina Hall and Golda V. Hall.

Adina Hall gave birth to my mother, Gertrude Patricia Levin Whyte, however she died while my mother was still an infant. My mother and her elder sister Hillis were raised in our Village of Savan by their grandmother, Miss Gussy, while her two elder brothers were raised on Jost Van Dyke by their Dad on his farm. They both returned as young men to my great-grandmother on St. Thomas. I am the proud mother of one son, Koi, who is Head of Strategy and Operations at Amazon Web Services in Seattle, Washington; and two daughters – Geataeus Willocks, a Principal Radio Frequency Systems Engineer with SAIC in Los

Angeles, California; and Jendayi S. Setorie-Collingwood who is an Accountant with the CPA firm of Collingwood and Associates here on St. Croix. I am also sister/mother or MoSis as she has coined it, to Yanique Williams Meryl who is a Mental Health Therapist and Entrepreneur in Coral Springs, Florida. Because of them, I am.

I had the God-inspired opportunity to be raised by a young mother, great-grandmother, and stepfather who though all came from very modest beginnings, they spared absolutely nothing to provide me with the most affluent life. Affluent not in dollars and cents necessarily but in culture, adventure, explorations, opportunities, and knowledge. My upbringing met the affluent test because of our strong family and blood ties, as well as a village of love ties. And the maxim was simple. All of the adults, who encircled and abutted the Big Yard, and in my case included every adult on the entire “block” were considered parents. We walked the neighborhood under the watchful eyes of each adult with laser focus on our wellbeing. Moreover, the older children in the Village acted and treated us as our big sisters and big brothers. Again, another tier of protection, love and support in the sanctuary. All of us younger children were everybody’s children.

My love for learning began at pre-school. At the age of 2-1/2 I attended the renowned Miss Thomas School, which was located ‘Round the Field’ and

affectionately known as Hospital Ground in St. Thomas. The school, which was well known for the early education of many notable St. Thomians, was owned and operated by the distinguished Mrs. Louise Vanterpool Thomas and her mother, Mrs. Agatha Adela Ferdinand Vanterpool; she was known as the grandmother to all of their students. Mrs. Louise Vanterpool Thomas is the mother of our retired Superior Court Judge Audrey L. Thomas and her siblings.

My love for learning grew in Savan as I attended the (Leonard) Dober, Jane E. Tuitt and Commandant Gade elementary schools. My learning continued as I attended the then Wayne Aspinall Junior High School (the first year that it was established), the Charlotte Amalie High School and the then Nazareth Bay High School (proudly again the first year that it was established).

After high school I left for New York to attend college in the CUNY system. In the early 1980's, I returned to my beloved home in the Virgin Islands to complete my education and began a career of service as well at the then College of the Virgin Islands (CVI) on St. Croix. I was hired as administrative assistant in the School of Nursing in 1982. In that year, CVI commenced the associate degree in nursing education program on St. Croix. I was very fortunate to be mentored by Ms. Ione M. Armstrong, Professor of Nursing, who hailed from Frederiksted.

Later, I served with the Department of Planning and Natural Resources initially within the Office of the Commissioner before transferring into the Office of Comprehensive and Coastal Zone Planning (CCZP) as an Associate Planner. In that capacity, I worked on researching, mapping, and writing several community, historical, coastal development, and zoning recommendation and land-use reports. One of the noted accomplishments of my tenure at CCZP includes being a team member in the planning, development and drafting of the first Virgin Islands Comprehensive Land and Water Use Plan.

In spite of my love for my service at DPNR, PSC afforded me a much greater challenge career-wise and personal growth with a focus on care for Virgin Islanders. But for this move, I would probably not be addressing this distinguished Committee today.

My tenure at the PSC has a mixture of experiences including the growth of the Commission. The PSC has come a mighty long way since its establishment in 1965. The Commission began with two staff members and regulatory authority over port functions such as lighterage and wharfage. Today, the PSC has emerged as an organization with the principal mission and oversight to ensure corporations, and complex public authorities provide reliable services and facilities to Virgin Islanders. Our increased population, economic activities, and reliance on complex

and interwoven utility services make that simple office impossible to imagine today.

In April 1996, the then Executive Director, himself a former senator, Patrick N. William hired me as the single administrative official on St. Croix to mediate and resolve ratepayers' complaints, compile data for utilities reports, and perform public relation among other duties. Importantly, I acquired my knowledge of the PSC innerworkings under the tutorage of notables such as Alexander A. Petersen Sr. Esq., Keithley Joseph, and most recently former Senator Donald G. "Ducks" Cole.

In the business of the public services commission, education on public utility regulation is key. Hence, I served as a member of the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissions on the Staff Subcommittees on Telecommunications, Staff Subcommittees on International Relations, and Staff Subcommittees on Consumer Affairs. I am also an alumna of the Institute of Public Utilities studying the Annual Regulatory Studies Program for regulatory professionals at the Michigan State University.

I have represented our agency at the *Organisation of Caribbean Utility Regulators (OOCUR)* at several of its annual conferences. These gatherings

present an opportunity to share and learn regulatory best practices specific to the Caribbean. At its fourth annual conference in Grenada in September 2006, I gave a presentation of best practices on “Regulation of the Wastewater Sector.”

In the early 2000’s, I worked along with our then Commissioners and staff to host our regional *Mid-Atlantic Conference of Regulatory Utilities Commissioners* (MACRUC). The Conference promotes the region-wide advancement of public utility regulation and the related regulatory, legislative, and policy interests of its member. The organization did not only highlight the Virgin Islands but brought a wealth of lessons learned and experiences to the growth of the PSC. To this day, we still receive raving reviews and compliments from MACRUC commissioners who attended.

In 2016 to 2017, I served as the hearing examiner on the PSC Docket 661, Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority’s Application for Septage Waste Disposal Fees. In this capacity I scheduled and conducted public hearings, compiled data, investigated and reviewed technical reports, and rendered recommendations supported by the data and the records to the Commission.

As written in the Virgin Islands Code, the Public Services Commission’s holds a clearly stated mandate.

Every public utility doing business within the Virgin Islands is required to furnish service and facilities reasonably safe and adequate and in all respects just and reasonable.

The mission is of paramount importance to our Commission members, our personnel, and me. More so, I recognize the expertise at the PSC to thoroughly perform reviews, investigations, and decision making. This ability ensures that Virgin Islands' ratepayers and our regulated businesses receive their promised services. I take this responsibility seriously and believe in our legislative mandate of fairness and due process for all of our stakeholders.

As a lifelong Virgin Islander, I lived the nexus of utilities issues that often trouble our Territory. But that's not all. I have been on the receiving end of less than quality service, increased billings, and at times, unfair practices. I counsel our team to leave no stone unturned to provide the best possible representation on behalf of those that we serve.

There is broad consensus in our Territory on the ever-escalating issues impacting our public utilities ratepayers as well as the public utilities themselves. And though it is not always evident, important progress is being made to transform the provision and delivery of public necessities. We are increasing training to our PSC

staff on specific issues of interest. However, much more needs to be done. The solutions, as we see daily, grow more complex as well, as we strive to get to greater sources of renewable energy, management of waste reduction, and affordable and reliable trans-islands transportation.

Give me the opportunity to continue to contribute and manage the success of the Virgin Islands Public Services Commission. A monumental task lies ahead. As the Virgin Islands public utilities experience technological changes and the effect of global warming, we too at the PSC need a change manager to meet the needs of our communities, improve performance, balance growth, and advance the resilience of our PSC team, our people, and critical infrastructure.

As the executive director, my primary responsibility is to manage the PSC's staff and functions and carry out decisions of the Commission. The mandate of the PSC is to ensure that Virgin Islands residents and visitors have access to reliable and cost-effective public service. PSC functions include overseeing and directing both executive and administrative operations, as well as advising the Commission on regulatory issues and concerns critical to the public services that we regulate.

In addition, the Executive Director creates processes to eliminate barriers and to qualified decision making in the delivery of fair and reasonable rates for services within our jurisdiction.

I earned three university degrees while holding full-time jobs and raising my children. This required working days and attending classes at night (and vice versa) for several years. I mentioned this because life is always a juggling act which calls for prioritizing tasks and assignments, activities, and meeting deadlines. While we often talk about balancing our workload, management activities, etc., it is really more like juggling our duties and responsibilities to attain the best outcome.

Over the last 20 years, I effectively co-managed the PSC. I have mentored, coached and trained numerous staff members, who have themselves moved up the ranks of our organization and/or successfully advanced to other agencies or corporations.

I have developed policies and I am currently – with cohorts in our organization – drafting and developing standard operating procedures and processes aimed at improving our systems and services.

My short-term goals include continuing to:

- Become a more impactful “thought-leader” in utility regulation, aimed at crafting quality, functional content for stronger internal and external communication;
- Provide practical tools and systems – to increase/improve productivity – for personnel, members, utilities and ratepayers;
- Develop a common message and voice that will demonstrate improved performance and increase public visibility.

My longer-termed goals and objectives for the PSC include:

- Increasing coordination between service providers, regulated and unregulated, energy, telecommunications, and waste management – to provide greater reliable and cost-effective services;
- Increasing coordination between agencies, to make overlapping areas of concern more effective (e.g., permitting of underground projects; leasing for independent power generation, etc.); and also,
- Improving coordination with key federal agencies to support our services, such as the Federal Communications Commission, and the Department of Energy, Department of Interior.

CONCLUSION

I wish to acknowledge the many ratepayers and worthy recipients of our services at the PSC for your continued support of our staff, particularly our consumer/utility personnel who review, investigate, and mediate complaints and inquiries – as well as manage public and community outreach programs. They are our frontline who take pride in diligently working on your behalf. We hear from you every day regarding how much you appreciate them. I look forward to representing the highest ideals of what our community and our people expect. Thank you.

Madame Chair, I conclude my statement by thanking you and the members of your committee for the invitation to appear before you. I ask for your favorable consent and vote to continue to lead the remarkable staff and members of the Virgin Islands Public Service Commission and to serve the citizens of the Virgin Islands of the United States.