



| Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection

Legislature USVI

March 26, 2024 · 2.8 hours · gov

Source recording	https://youtu.be/QIKh8Q1DApc
Status	This is a working transcript produced by machine from a recording of a public proceeding. It is a finding aid, not an official record of the Legislature.
Transcribed by	VI Update, using OpenAI Whisper large-v3-turbo, run locally. Not reviewed by a person.
Reliability	Automatic transcription, UNVERIFIED. Verify every quotation against the recording before relying on it. Speech recognition splits spoken digits and wraps figures mid-number, so a dollar amount, a vote count or a bill number can be wrong in a way that reads as correct. Speakers are not identified: automatic speaker labelling was measured unusable and removed.
Public record	The underlying proceeding is a public record of the Legislature of the Virgin Islands. 3 V.I.C. § 881(a) defines public records to include all records and documents of or belonging to this Territory or any branch of government, or any "department, board, council or committee of any branch of government" · which names legislative committees by category. § 881(b) gives every citizen the right to examine and copy such records, and the news media the right to publish them. (The open-meetings chapter, 1 V.I.C. § 254, does NOT reach the Legislature: § 253(b) expressly excludes it and its Standing and Special Committees. § 881 does, and it is § 881 that confers the right to copy and publish.) The Legislature broadcast this proceeding publicly itself. The source recording is not ours, is not hosted here, and remains with its publisher at the link above.
Rights	To what we added · the transcription, its arrangement and its description · we assert nothing. A verbatim transcript is mechanical rather than authored, so there is likely nothing in it to own; to the extent any copyright is nonetheless found to subsist, it is dedicated to the public domain under CC0 1.0. Please copy it, quote it, index it, train on it, republish it, mirror it, sell it. Redistribution is the point: a public record with one copy is one fire from gone. No permission is needed, and none is ours to grant or withhold.

0:00:00 Let's get started. Thank you.

0:01:00 Thank you. Thank you.

0:02:00 We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. Let's go. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Bye-bye. We'll be right back. We'll see you next time. Thank you. Okay, so we have, we have Diani.

0:19:30 We have the Yanni Angel. Thank you. We'll see you next time.

0:21:00 Good morning, colleagues, senatorial, central staff, testifiers, and our listening and viewing audience. The Committee on Government Operations, Veteran Affairs, and Consumer Protection meeting for Tuesday, March 26, 2024, is hereby called to order. I take this opportunity today to once again to thank my colleagues who signed on and voted favorably on Bill 35-0226 to support the VI Department of Justice Division of Paternity and Child Support in securing a minimum default child support payment for our children in the territory. The default payment will address the challenges faced by the VI Department of Justice's Paternity and Child Support Division to have non-custodial parents show up for hearings and provide the required financial documentation. Moreover, it holds non-custodial parents accountable for child support when they fail to appear for the hearing and when they fail to provide the financial information required to calculate payments based on their ability to pay in line with the federal and local law. The approval of this bill now puts the Virgin Islands a step closer to helping single-parent households and alleviating childhood poverty in our community. I would also like to thank my colleagues for supporting Bill No. 35-223, an act renaming a portion of Gamal Gadda, Bishop Dr.

William A. Industrious Street. Bishop Industrious has unselfishly given his time and resources to our community. His refusal to take a salary for over 60 years shows his servant's heart and dedication to

0:23:13 ministry. The good bishop will represent a legacy of a kind, godly, dependable man with a heart of serving others. Again, thank you to my colleagues for supporting these two measures, which now move on to the governor for final consideration and approval. Here we are at the end of March, which celebrates two, two of my favorite, significant observances, Virgin Islands History Month and Women's History Month. The achievements and contributions of Virgin Islands people continue to amaze me every day. From the early trailblazers, such as the three queens, Queen Mary, Queen Agnes, and Queen Mathilda, these three queens advance the movement for labor rights for all in the early days of this territory following the abolition of slavery. They took a bold stand for equity and justice. Other significant trailblazers who have made significant contributions in our community and on the world stage include Lucinda Millen, Dr. Marcella Nunez-Smith, and Aliyah Boston.

0:24:49 Lucinda Millen was the first woman elected to the Virgin Islands legislature. One of her areas of focus was the living condition of the elderly and Millen was successful in building a home for them. The Lucinda Millen Home in St. Thomas honors her legacy. Dr. Marcella Nunez, a Yale professor from the U.S. Virgin Islands, was named by President Joseph Biden as a co-chair of his Coronavirus Task Force, which focused on racial and ethnic equity. Aaliyah Boston, what can be said about this great young lady is a professional basketball player for the Indiana fever and the first the first woman to play in the Women's National Basketball Association WNBA in 2023 Aaliyah was named the WNBA rookie of the year unanimously some of her many accolades and awards include WNBA All-Star 2023, WNBA All-Rookie Team 2023, WNBA Field Goal Percentage Leader 2023, AP WNBA Rookie of the Year 2023, and AP, what is Associated Press, WNBA All-Rookie team 2023. Our Virgin Islands have a rich and extraordinary history. We also honor men such as Dee Hamilton Jackson, Alton Adams, Emile Griffith, Elrod Hendricks, Julian Jackson, Tim Duncan, and of course the man from housing where I grew up in Aswa Harris Court, Tiron Thomas. Once again, I am just mentioning a few of many for their achievements that have placed the Virgin Islands on the world stage. Let us continue to share stories and educate our children about outstanding Virgin Islanders and their achievement. It shows every Virgin Islands child that we are people of excellence this week marks holy week across our community it is a time when the family of believers in Jesus Christ pause to recognize Jesus Christ's life before his crucifixion and the celebration of Easter Sunday Holy Week and Easter are powerful reminders

0:27:43 of Jesus love sacrifice forgiveness and victory I wish everyone a happy Easter on behalf of my family and staff Madam Clerk kindly proceed to roll call Senator Samuele, present, present, Senator Fonseca, Senator Fonseca, Fonseca, present, Sika, present, present, present, present, Senator Alma Francis Heiliger, present, Senator Francis Heiliger, present, Senator Kenneth L. Gittins, Senator Gittins, absent, Senator Javon E. James Sr., Senator James Sr., present, Senator Carla J. Joseph, present, Senator Senator Joseph, present. Senator Milton E. Potter. Senator Potter, absent. Madam Chair, we have four present, three absent.

0:28:57 Thank you, Madam Clerk. We do have a quorum. Madam Clerk and colleagues, thank you for being here. Madam Clerk, do we have any correspondence? Yes, we do. Kindly read them into the record. A letter dated March 24th, 2024, to the Honorable Carla J. Joseph, Chairwoman of the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection, 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands, Capitol Building, Charlotte and Mali, Virgin Islands, 00802. Dear Chairwoman Joseph, due to a previously scheduled medical appointment on the mainland, I will be unable to attend the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection, scheduled for Tuesday, March 26, 2024, at 10 a.m. at the Fritz E. Lawrence LeWitt Legislative Conference Room on St. Croix.

0:29:56 Please excuse my absence. I extend my best wishes for a productive and harmonious committee meeting. Please ensure that all action taken during the committee meeting are forwarded to my office for review and consideration. I thank you in advance for your understanding in this matter and sincerely apologize for any inconvenience my absence may cause. Sincerely, Senator Milton E. Potter. A letter dated March 26, 2024, to the Honorable Senator Carla J. Joseph, chairwoman of the committee on government operations veterans affairs and consumer protection dear chairwoman Joseph please excuse my absence at the committee on government operations veterans affairs and consumer protection hearings scheduled for March 26 2024 due to a previously scheduled engagement that I cannot reschedule I will not be able to attend I note the importance of the agenda items to be discussed in today's hearing and I ask that any additional information shared during the hearing be forwarded to my office I thank you in advance for your understanding sincerely Kenneth L. Giddens senator a letter dated March 26 2024 to the Honorable Carla J. Joseph chairwoman Dear Chairwoman Joseph, please accept my apologies for my tardiness to today's Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs and Consumer Protection meeting. I am presently at an appointment that I scheduled in advance of this meeting and kindly ask for your patience and understanding until I can join the meeting. I am looking forward to participating fully as

soon as I arrive. Thank you in advance for your kind consideration and understanding. Sincerely, Samuel Carrion, Senator, 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands. Madam Chair, this ends the reading of today's correspondence.

0:32:00 Thank you so kindly, Madam Clerk. Madam Clerk, note on the roll call that both Senator Potter and Senator Gittins are excused, And we will still have Senator Carillon as tardy, and when he comes as absent, and when he arrives, we will mark him present. Kindly give the tally now.

0:32:30 We have four members present, one absent, and two excused. Thank you so kindly, Madam Chair. Madam Clerk, clerk please proceed to reading today's agenda into the record the committee on government operations veterans affairs and consumer protection has scheduled a meeting for 10 a.m on tuesday march 26th in the fritz elowitz legislative contents room on st croix the purpose of the meeting is to receive testimony and consider the following legislative measures in block one 10 a.m to 12 p.m. the committee will receive testimony concerning bill number three five dash zero zero three zero an act honoring and commending Vaughn Benjamin posthumously for his contributions to reggae music in the Virgin Islands and the global communities appropriating forty five thousand dollars to Department of Sports Parks and Recreation for design and construction of the Vaughn Benjamin monument and naming water park front west the Marley naming water for waterfront park west of the Marley homes the Vaughn a Quebeca Memorial Park this bill is sponsored by senators Novell E Francis jr. and Hale Bocas jr. and Carla J. Joseph. The invited testifiers are Ms. Sheneth Kanagata, Ms. Asesha Benjamin, Mr. Jahani Benjamin, Ms. Tysa Benjamin, Ms. Niani Benjamin, Mr. Quengo Benjamin, Mr. Stararo Benjamin, Miss Gracieja Benjamin, Mr. Farach Avekodaw, Mr. Raymond Armstrong, Mr. Vivonne Smith Jr., Mr. Dale Wathi, Mr. Michael Leonel, and Mr. Phil Conjurington. Madam Chair, this ends the reading of Block 1 of today's agenda.

0:34:49 Thank you so kindly, Madam Clerk, for reading all of those names. Ladies and gentlemen and the listening audience, we do have 14 individuals who were invited to testify on this very important resolution to really recognize posthumously Mr. Vaughn John Akibeka Benjamin for all his contributions musically and as an advocate in our community here in the St. Croix District and the Virgin Islands as a whole. And also I want to recognize the president of the 35th legislature, the Honorable Novelle E. Francis, Jr.

0:35:49 And so we want to be able to have a good conversation, a really good conversation, because this gentleman is definitely worthy of that. And later on, after we complete this, because we were anticipating 14 people, so we had a good two hours sectioned out to accommodate this bill. And then thereafter, from 2 to 5, we'll be doing a tour of the Lieutenant Governor's office in Christianstead. Who speaks on behalf of Bill 35-0030? I do, Madam Chair. Mr. President, you are recognized.

0:36:36 Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Good morning to you, my colleagues. Good morning to the people of the Virgin Islands. And of course, good morning to those in the audience today and those testifying. I am deeply honored, or more profoundly honored, to present Bill 35.0030 and honoring and commending Vaughan Benjamin posthumously for his contributions in reggae music in the Virgin Islands and the global communities. Appropriating \$45,000 to the Department of Sports Park and Recreation for the design and construction of the Vaughan Benjamin monument and naming the waterfront park west of the Molly homes the Vaughan Akibeka Memorial Park. Thank you for this opportunity to speak on bill number 35.0030 which honors and commend this giant Vaughan A. Benjamin Akibeka as he was later known for his contributions to Reagan Music, and to our community. This bill also provides for the design and for the renaming of the Waterfront Park.

0:37:47 Today's testifiers are people who can speak to Vaughn's life and his legacy. We have musicians, friends, and family here today. I thank you all for being here today to help in moving this bill forward. Let's also be mindful that, again, this day, present a lot of anxiety and emotions for people in this community, but more importantly for his family. So I ask that we continue to give them their respect as we honor this great giant of a member of our community.

0:38:21 And at this time, I'd like to show, ask Media to show a video, and then I'll continue with a few remarks before we go into the testifiers' presentation. Thank you very much, madam. Cheer for the time. Media, the video is ready. For your lamentations And your thoughts, the difference of lamentations The different lamentations Send us of goodness and mercy If you love the life you live You need the life you love You need the life You need the life you love Thank you very much, Madam Chair, for that brief video.

0:39:36 Again, this certainly don't capture all of the time on earth for Vaughn Benjamin, Aki Becker. However, again, we just wanted to highlight that and bring some remembrance as we continue to contemplate this measure before us. Vaughn Andre Benjamin was born into a musical family. Midnight was originally Ron's band. brought Vaughn in who was studying at Rutgers to St. Croix when the island was finally revitalized after Hugo and made him the front man. Without Midnight ban there would be no Akibeka. As Midnight Vaughn and Roddy moved to Washington DC in the mid 1990s

while in Washington DC the ban began gaining a regional and national following. Speaking from personal experience once you saw Vaughn you saw Ronnie. Ronnie certainly is a brother to me as well we're high school classmates and individual that spent a lot of time together while we were growing up so he's like a brother to me as well. As Midnight in 1997 the band released its first album Nambia to international acclaim and over 25 years became renowned around the world for the deep and spiritual lyrics and trademark sound around the world there were midnight but here at home with a plane at the sandbar and Sunday night or at other venues across the territory Vaughn and Ronnie or two humble guys engaging with the community that raised them and living their lives. Aki Becker evolution as a person, as a musician, continued when he took the name Aki Becker, which was also known name of the new band. Von Benjamin, Aki Becker's life cannot be measured by his industry. Awards

- 0:41:36 and record sales, he was more than that. He was a lifelong learner, avid reader, a prolific writer and poet he was a spiritual teacher and a leader to many in the Rastafarian faith and a global icon in the Rastafarian movement most of us all to most of all he was a son a brother a friend uncle a nephew and a father to the family that deeply grieves this is a posthumous award because we did not give Yvonne Akibeka his flowers while he was here to receive them. I will let those who knew him best take over from here.
- 0:42:21 At this time, Madam Chair, again, we have the testifiers, and at the conclusion of this presentation, I'm not a member of this committee, but I do ask that we vote in the affirmative to move this measure forward. Thank you very much, Madam Chair, for the time and opportunity. And thank you so much, Senator Francis. Well, we have four gentlemen here prepared to testify, and I believe we also have some written testimony that clerk would read into the record, as well as we have online two test, three testifiers, Nani Benjamin, Jahai Benjamin, and Sheneth Kanagata. data. So how I will proceed is I'm going to have the individuals who are online, we're going to do a microphone check and visual check as well, because we want to be able to see who we are talking to and who is presenting their testimony. So I'm going to ask the testifiers online to please put on your camera. And I'll start first with Nayani Benjamin, if I'm mispronouncing your name, kindly correct me. A pleasant good morning, we're doing a microphone check, and a visual check as well.
- 0:43:49 Good morning. Good morning. Good morning, we can see you, wonderful. Jahai Benjamin, if I'm mispronouncing your name, kindly correct me. We're doing a microphone check and a visual check. Okay, we're not hearing or seeing Jahai Benjamin, but we do know he is there. And then we had Ms. Kanagata, but I don't see her anymore.
- 0:44:41 So what we're going to do, we're going to begin with you, Ms. Na'ani Benjamin. I believe you're prepared to present your testimony. Give me one moment. I sent in my written testimony. Okay, so you're going to be reading your written testimony, but two, I want to check the microphone of the four testifiers, before you begin, who are joining us here live in the conference room. We'll start on my right, your left, with Mr. Phil Armstrong.
- 0:45:19 Mr. Cotterington. Mr. Cotterington, Mr. Phil Cotterington. Just a microphone check. Good morning. Mic check. Morning, everybody. Good morning. The gentleman next to you, please state your name and good morning. My name is Dale Wattie, a.k.a. Ross Jarred. Good morning and welcome. Bevan Smith. Good morning and welcome. Blessed day, blessed day, blessed day. Raymond Amshian, Ross Beaksdorf.
- 0:45:50 Good morning and welcome. We thank all of you for joining us today. Ms. Benjamin, you may proceed with reading your testimony into the record. This bill is befitting Yvonne Benjamin due in part to his legacy as an artist and his encouragement for lifelong learning and civic engagement. Through his music and message, he was a vocal advocate for Pan-African solidarity and often spoke out against imperialism, colonialism, and neocolonialism in various parts of the world.
- 0:46:26 In his words, he found helping many very fulfilling and civic. As a young adult coming into the world, he reassured me in my educational endeavors, encouraging me to stick to my path because the possibilities were limitless and to have sparkling thoughts. He urged me to stay conscientious and to listen and observe closely. These words I took with me throughout my educational journey and I hope they inspire other youth to pursue their aspirations and engage positively with their communities. I believe these words, in combination with his advocacy for marginalized peoples, his thought-provoking musical activism, and his encouragement for continuous learning make him a suitable recipient for this honor. Thank you. Thank you so much, Ms. Benjamin, for that testimony.
- 0:47:15 And I will ask Mr. Phil Cotrington, you may proceed with reading your testimony into the record. MR. PLEASANT. Good morning, Madam Chair, Mr. President, Senator James, looking forward to seeing Mr. Carrion when he arrives. My name is Phil Cotrington. I'm a member of the Ethiopian World Federation, Local No. 5, Incorporated, a registered membership corporation in existence since 1937, established by His Imperial Majesty, Emperor Haile Selassie I, for the black people of the world.

- 0:47:59 Our preamble states, we the black people of the world, in order to effect unity, solidarity, liberty, freedom, and self-determination, to secure justice and maintain the integrity of Ethiopia, which is our divine heritage, to hereby establish and ordain this constitution for the Ethiopian World Federation, Inc. The EWF applauds the Senate and the executive branch for recognizing the musical contributions of Von Andre Benjamin, aka Midnight Akibeka, and granting him the honor of naming the park along the west side of Veterans Drive in his honor with signage bearing the title Akibeka with the construction of a monument bearing his image. The EWF welcomes and support the VI government and the global community to help give Vaughan recognition due to him in perpetuity. The Kabba stone of the Rastafari community here in the VI and beyond. Akibeka the legendary, a global mentor and teacher via Roots Music. I am here on behalf of the EWF Local 5 in support of bill number 35-0030 recognizing Vaughn, lead vocalist of Midnight Band and later Akibeka Band. Vaughn whom I knew personally and had the privilege to reason with him one-on-one on several occasions. There are many things I can think of to speak about concerning Vaughan and the memories I have of him and his brother Ronnie. Honourable mention also to Phil Merchant aka Pix and Dion Bosie Hopkins whom I knew as well. It would be more appropriate to just quote a few of his roots lyrics from his over thousand plus They have low ways, sweet and convincing in the beginning, the two-face of
- 0:50:06 evil and oppression, the two-face of negative and suppression. I am the Kabba stone, the original cornerstone, the Kabba stone, polarity, the paradox is in the ugliness of vanity they are destroying the blueprint so no one can see who is the original and who is the copy this is from the track title cover stone come slave pick any son of ruling healers in foreign exile I greet you highest as family the idea never shot of time his imperial I vine deep red without a a bloodshot tear and steady i got four more man pandas move with me man was striving living up truth with moral discipline and liberty yeah the track titled birthright it's a time of technical it's a time of technical advancements unparalleled and still it is a difficult time a time where crime blows mine at the depravity of heinous actions don't go boy down the youth they are men of mission in a majority juvenile because they have courage and long coil behind a deceptive beguiling relaxing smile and they're not bad neither spirit is really loyal to the side it could have been evil and they will unite down for one another whatever for life they have it in our scars and stripes they have it in affiliation throw up sign always have ghetto mantis all in international is the same thing you find bless up my heart be well highly slassy when he speaks he break the Babylon spell one of the first dispersions taken away or just save the people heart to drink
- 0:51:58 wisdom well from the track title arise they try to put a bit into my mouth that I might obey and go wherever you say and say whatever you say say but I know your works well negative even though they keep holding on to my name the tribe track title who built Jerusalem on behalf of the executive committee of the EWF local number five we give thanks for the opportunity to testify madam chair and want to recognize all the one in support here today his family his youth Man, I see Allah, you give thanks for showing up, Rastafari. Thank you, Mr. Cotterington, for reading some of those lyrics.
- 0:52:41 Typically, I listen to it, and it's really good meditation music, especially in Arising. So I'm glad that you were able to bring those lyrics with you and put them on the record as part of your testimony today. Next, in line to testify, will be Mr. Wathi. Mr. Wathi, welcome and kindly proceed with reading your testimony into the record.
- 0:53:13 May I speak? You may kindly proceed. Can I take one moment of silence for the ancestors, for Akibeka, the presence to be here with us? Certainly. thank you so much I greet you in the name of our ancestors whose footsteps I try daily I give thanks for each and everyone being here this morning family the Senate and everyone to making this possible my name is Dale Watty also known as Ross Jarrett, I'm the owner of Natural Vibes, I'm the president of the house of Rastafari. I began working with Van Benjamin in 2001 when I was involved in promoting the VA reggae music. When I saw the potential of the lead singer of of Midnight Band. I was inspired to promote the music starting in the Boston area where I was living at the time.
- 0:54:33 I drove around the country promoting this music. When I did my first show here in St. Croix with Aki Becker, the Midnight Band, at the, it was Yami Bolo and Midnight Band at the I was inspired of that music and I felt the world needed to hear that music because it was a special music to us, very special to this day.
- 0:55:11 And I never turned back. I drove across America, I told Vaughn, I said, brother, the world have to hear y'all. And if I have to take it up, I will. And I did. I packed the music, I bought the music, and I drove around America, pushing this music sincerely, because it was needed. Eventually, I had the opportunity to travel with the band, serving under many different hats. During this time, people from all different walks of life was exposed to the work of Vaughn, Benjamin, and Midnight.
- 0:55:50 Shortly after, I was given the task of executive producer, producing couple albums for the band. Anyway, anyone who has worked with Vaughn can testify to his natural musical ability, and the level of consciousness he conveyed through his music. Vaughn Benjamin is known and loved internationally for his inspiration, conscious and uplifting works, through his lyrical contents. Vaughn was a very special being.

- 0:56:32 The way Vaughn laid music down, it was not normal, I saw that. I didn't wait to honor Vaughn on this day. I saw the potential of this brother and I gave him my all because I love Midnight and the band Akibeka and the whole group, all of them. So I started to become a promoter of the Virgin Islands. I started pushing the music because it was very important at that time. I was in Boston, Massachusetts, and we create a Virgin Islands outlet where they all came and performed in Boston. To this day, they love it and they're still carrying it on. So I wanna say to my family, it's an honor that y'all are honoring Von Benjamin because around the world is honoring him. Why can't we in this island? Europe have a mural of Von Benjamin.
- 0:57:36 Hanging big, people around the world is going to see him because they love Von Benjamin. A king is not recognized in his home, but out there, I was out there. I wasn't home when this was going on. I can't speak for aye-aye, but I could speak out there. Von Benjamin have taught many, he have educated many, he have inspired many. He was very special, special person. So I wanna say to y'all, I want to thank each and everyone y'all for coming here, families, friends, musicians, to support this bill because it's needed.
- 0:58:18 Vaughn Benjamin was from Antigua but he grew up in this island of St. Croix. Let's give respect to Ronnie Benjamin, his brother. As Senator said, everywhere you've seen Vaughn, you've seen Ronnie. When he was playing on stage and singing on stage, he goes behind his brother. Give respect where respect is due. Give thanks for these brothers and give thanks for everyone. Contribute towards this movement. Conclude by saying, this moment and naming of the Waterfront Park is necessary for the Virgin Islands to know, and remember, and keep inspired by one of our own for their worldwide contribution. Von Benjamin was a father, an educator, a scholar, a musician, and so much more. I am full support of the bill 35-0030. I pray whoever is in charge of bringing this bill forward takes it into full consideration. We love y'all, we are here for y'all, and support your 100% love, peace, and harmony.
- 0:59:37 Ja, Rastafari. And thank you so much, Mr. Wathi, for that very passionate testimony. You gave us a very vibrant. I love Van, I love Van. And it shows, you show it, you show it, you show it. It's okay, it's okay. We give thanks, we give thanks for that love. And so we can hear it, we can see it, and we are knowing a little bit more about what went on behind the scenes of this great man who we've taken up the full morning to honor and give thanks. Next, we will invite Mr. Bevan Smith to present your testimony into the record.
- 1:00:32 Mr. Smith, kindly proceed. Good morning to the Honorable Carla Joseph, Chair of the Committee on Government Operations and Consumer Protection, Honorable Noble E. Francis, sponsor of the Bill 035-0030, a resolution honoring and commending Van Benjamin. All other senators present today, to the listening and viewing audience. My name is Bevan Smith, Jr., and this written testimony is submitted as a private citizen and a reggae music enthusiast residing in the U.S. Virgin Islands. I concur with the legislature of the Virgin Islands that it is fitting to posthumously honor and commend Juan Benjamin on behalf of the Virgin Islands for his outstanding musical, intellectual, spiritual contributions to both the Virgin Islands and the international community. The whereas clause within the bill has accurately highlighted several areas that validates why Vaughan Benjamin, herein after referred as Akibeka, is deserving of this recognition and is the most prolific, globally accomplished and widely respected position to ever come out of the Virgin Islands. My first encounter with Akibeka was while he was the lead vocalist for Midnight in 1989 where they performed on stage at the Midland nightclub. It became evident why so many have become intrigued by their pulsating bass sound and strong lyrics. Along with his elder brother Ronnie Benjamin Jr., they seemed to hit the ground running with their early music recordings and on stage performances. I was convinced that they were on the path for a successful musical career after seeing the audience's positive response during one of their performances at the Roxy's nightclub in Washington, DC. However, it was at the locally produced
- 1:02:37 second annual Royal Reggae Fest that Professor Skank of The Beat magazine wrote. In 2001, I was fortunate to receive the re-release debut album of Midnight, entitled Unpolished. After just one listen, I knew this group was extremely special. They played a hardcore root style, which I absolutely love. The catch was, they were not from Jamaica. Rather, hail from St. Croix in the U.S. Virgin Islands. It was evident that Akibeka was an avid reader, but what was most notable was his ability to comprehend the information use his own insights to discern subliminal messages therein, convert them into lyrics, and metallotically convey an interesting interpretation to the listening audience.
- 1:03:30 This is an attribute that school teachers and college professors try to instill in their students, making Akibeka a role model in this regard. Many in the music industry consider him one of the most profound wordsmiths among artists within the reggae genre. However, with all accolades bestowed upon him as a global entertainer performing in front of a multitude of fans spanning many continents, what stood out to me was his humility, ability to remain grounded amidst the fame and global attention he was obviously exposed. His first-born son, Senua, and my son, Dishan, were teammates on one of the many American youth soccer organization teams. When he was on Ireland, he made the time to attend the soccer matches and would marvel at the athleticism displayed by these two young athletes. Even though he may have just returned from

performing live concerts in several major cities, he would never mention a word or give me any indication that he was a superstar in the making. His focus was always on the talents of the young men would display. He was an intellect that love sharing information and discussing world topics while cooling in the Frederick said fish market. In the documentary of the evolution of reggae music in the Virgin Islands, it is apparent how much influence he had on other musicians and producers over the years. Just listen to the chorus in Pressure Bus Pipe song, Virgin Islands Nice. It was on the morning of November 5th, 2019, while cutting grass and listening to radio through my earphones that I heard the terrible news of his passing. I reflected on the last time we spoke after his performance on the grounds of the Laouette's museum earlier that same year. He was so amazed that even after the promoter announced the concert had to end, the audience stood in place as if waiting for an encore. Despite the huge crowds he had grown accustomed to while performing abroad, he was so taken aback at the tremendous positive response from his home crowd

1:05:41 that he insisted that the promoter should continue the show. On the day of his intimate, I planted two mango trees in his honour as my personal tribute to Quebeca. Therefore, it is fitting that this auspicious body, and Act Bill 35-0030, that posthumously honour and commend him appropriate monies to construct the Van Benjamin Monument and for the Waterfront Park area west of the Mali Homes to be named the Vaughan Akibeka Benjamin Memorial Park. In closing, I too would like to recite a few lyrics that Midnight's first album, Unpolished, in order to demonstrate its timeliness when it was released and its applicability to the Virgin Islandians and the global community even up to today.

1:06:33 Your body is your temple, your one and only temple. You are living in the holy places of the tabernacle of the Mosai Jah. Love the life you live. Lead the life you love. Don't shed no tears. Black is the color of our solar system. Out of blackness was born the light. Black is the color of the whole universe. Your morning starts with darkness. Did not your morning start with darkness? Well, so does tonight. Alpha and Omega I the beginning and the end Mama Mama I keep wishing I could capture love in a battle and blow it all around I keep wishing I could capture justice in America and fling it all around sling down down way justice don't sell out to the highest trigger finger oh slinging down way when you the mccall nigger stop pull trigger on one another and finally it is a national material competition the eagle have the bomb and the lion must have none in their international material competition who should have the liar shares now is the lion's son CIA KGB Mossad IRA Scatter Yard and the PLO turn to make out on Israel and NATO. Tell me, oh, why are they fighting so? Everybody wants to be the leader in the house where the diamonds come from. Everybody wants to be the leader where all the natural resources come from. We are the lions, we come in dread, dreading now we walk, not the I thank you for the opportunity. It was an honor.

1:08:37 And we are so grateful that you were able to be here to give that riveting testimony, Mr. Smith. It showed a level of enlightenment to those of us who actually had the opportunity to listen, you and your family members, by extension, his musical talent, as well as the Midnight Band combined musical talent. What a powerful testimony, and we thank you for being here to present it.

1:09:11 Next, we will recognize Mr. Raymond Armstrong. Mr. Armstrong? Yes, greetings. Greetings. Bless everybody. Bless the family of Akibeka, Vaughn Benjamin. You may proceed. I'm Joseph Bushman. Akibeka, the voice of Midnight, von Benjamin, should be given the highest honor this community and the world at large has to offer.

1:09:51 His contributions, achievements, and recognition in the world music industry is indisputable. All over the earth, Akibeka, the voice of midnight, honored and tribute regularly. I am very sure honors and tribute will go on for generations to come. Set it and done. I am Raymond Armstrong, aka Big Stuff, aka Akibeka Soundstation International Juggling Bushman. Blessed day. Thank you so much, Mr. Armstrong, for that very powerful testimony as well. We have Ms. Shaneth Kanagata. I see that you're online. Can we view you visually as well, Ms. Kanagata? She has her testimony to present. Ms. Calwood, are there some testimonies that can be read into the record?

1:11:16 Mr. President, you're recognized for your point of information. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. As we continue to, at least before we have the reading of the testimony by his sister, at Connecticut, I think it's most fitting that we recognize the presence of his children. I know that one spoke earlier, but we also have in the audience, Senba, Benjamin. And if the media could just sign the camera on him, if you could just quickly stand. I think that we want to recognize his presence here.

1:11:53 Stand again, so we could get a shot of the yes, respect. I know that there's other sisters, Ashisha Benjamin, as well as Niani Benjamin is also here, and Jani also, Jani Benjamin. So I just wanted us to make sure that we're recognizing and paying tribute to them as well for their contribution of their father, with respect. We're going to take just a very brief recess. Madam Clerk, you're ready?

1:12:40 Okay. How am I questioning you when you're usually ready? Madam Clerk, kindly proceed with reading the written testimonies that we have received into the record. Shauna, last night you shared that we would hang out and listen to

Midnight, not realizing how internationally known they were. I watched the video and though nicely done, the story is not accurate.

1:13:20 Midnight was formed in 1989 with Ron and his then band. The band members were given the task to suggest names for the band. Corey Kent came back with the name Midnight, and it was a hit. Bond lived in New Jersey at the time, and was at Rug Tours. Ronnie brought him to St. Croix when the island was finally revitalized after Hugo, and made him the front man. Without Midnight, there would be no Ake Beta.

1:13:51 we had two brothers one is no longer hair and we are trying our best to come to terms with it one brother is still hair grieving his brother this is what makes it difficult for our family we are still trying to come to terms my parents us the siblings with the death. We appreciate the honor that is being given to him.

1:14:22 We understand the love and respect for Vaughn and for his contributions, his gifts, and talents. We also understand the economic drive that inspires us. My brothers were talented beyond measure. Ron and Vaughn all the way. It was their infection combined gift that took the world by storm and made it remain alive and impactful today.

1:14:56 Like I said, Ron and Vaughn all the way. Madam Chair, this ends the reading of the testimony. Thank you so much, Madam Clerk. At this time, we are going to allow our colleagues colleagues to begin their round of questioning. We'll have four minutes, four minutes round of questioning, and if then we have any additional burning questions to ask the testifiers regarding the life of the late Vaughn Benjamin and even the Midnight Band, we'll proceed to do so.

1:15:38 At this time the chair will recognize Senator Alma Francis Heiliger. Senator Francis Heiliger, you're recognized for your four minutes. Unmute your device. Okay, try again. Good afternoon to my colleagues. Do you hear me? Loud and clear. Good afternoon, good. Good afternoon to my colleagues, good afternoon to the testifiers, good afternoon to all that came to really speak on behalf of Mr. Von Benjamin and all the wonderful things that we've heard that he's done. I too, a fan of Midnight Bands over the years, have listened intensely. And one of the things that I have always found was, I listened to lyrics because for me, lyrics is a form of poetry. And if anyone really listened to a lot of the words that were brought by this type of music that they put out, they would actually have learned a lot.

1:16:43 They would have understood a lot and they would have recognized what was coming out of the Virgin Islands. And to the testifiers, to families, and everyone that's there, thank you so much for coming out today and really participating with us to recognize and honor him. But what I wanna know, when I heard intensely listening to you guys speak about his musical talent, when did you guys as participants, whether as family or friends, members, band, really recognize his skills? Because it's astronomical what he is able, along with Midnight Band, to accomplish. Yes. You may proceed with answering. Please state your name before you answer so the recorder who is in St. Thomas can correctly and accurately transcribe what you're saying.

1:17:51 My name is Dale Wattie, AKA Ross Javed. To answer the question for me, like I said, First show with Midnight at Drive-In Theater, 2000, when I saw and heard the lyrics of my brother. There's no one in this world. I've been in music, I have did music with Bobby Brown, I've traveled with Bobby Brown, and many great singers. I've been at many Grammy. Von Benjamin, his lyrics, his education, His education, his knowledge of how he articulate words, it's unspeakable, it cannot be mentioned in words.

1:18:44 You just have to listen. Many people have heard his music and said, I don't understand what he said. Why? Because the words he's using pick up a dictionary. It makes you learn, broaden your horizon. Vaughn came and opened doors to his music. He said to me one day, he said, they're making a TV station every day to mess our children up. Why can't I make music to contradict what they're saying?

1:19:15 And he did it. I saw it. So give thanks for Akibeka and his work, his family, and his contribution to reggae music. It didn't take me, it didn't make me to recognize Vaughn when he's not here, because Vaughn is here with us. He's here right now, not physically in the farm, but he's here with us, listening to everything we are saying. So I did not wait until Vaughn has passed to recognize his lyrics and his contents. I love it, I love everything, every single one of his songs he make, it has a meaning and it has a purpose. Give thanks.

1:19:53 Excellent. One of the things that I also noted, because with us here as members of the Virgin Islands, you know, we have very unique music. And to know that people from the Virgin Islands have such an impact across the board to the entire world, I think that is a definite beautiful thing. And also, I am a proponent of pushing for our own Virgin Island culture, our heritage, through Virgin Island history. And I would love to see the information of Midnight Band and Vaughn and the members be incorporated into the teachings of our children. Because when we talk about who we are as a people, this is a perfect example of who we are. This is a perfect example of someone having such a great impact that not only us here in the virgin islands recognize it but around the world and that is a beautiful thing what are your thoughts about individuals in our territory that continue to make an impact to include people like von benjamin and the band midnight

band what are your thoughts about making sure that they're incorporated into the teachings of our children because we're about pride and we have to start instilling pride in them to know that listen you don't always have to look elsewhere there's a lot of things coming right out of the virgin olive that you could see a reflection of yourself in those individuals as well what are your thoughts on this any of the best uh i will answer um my name is raymond i'm sure and I like the question because I'm aware of a bill that has passed for

1:21:46 couples decades now that we should have our our curriculum with our our story in it and this is something that you know if we have this in our curriculum we will see them more we see more bass than more Timmy Duncan more Von Benjamin we will see them and we will recognize them from young but if we don't have this in our curriculum we gonna wait until these kind of moment to know so let's honor one of our past soldiers honor them that way but we should be honoring from the time they are you I used to work for parks and recreation so you know I know well I remember one son was in my tennis summer program in Canada you know and this is where you can recognize and give them the flowers from that age so I think I have a job to do to make this possible please definitely well thank you for that response um i think did i hear a time call i want to make sure stay within like four minutes uh senator francis heiliger your time was called but we wanted to get in well i'll wrap it up if yes i will wrap it up thank you very much madam chair for the additional time and i will definitely be voting in the affirmative for this piece of legislation because our history should be preserved and shared with the rest of the world as well as the children and the people of this territory thank you I thank you so much Senator Francis Heiliger mr. Smith you wanted to comment on the question yes

1:23:47 I kind of wanted to add to that question. Okay, kindly proceed. If I may Bevan Smith again. Again, after Unpolished, Vaughn kind of went way over my head. I mean, he's such a scholar. So she asked a question about what made you really realize. That album in itself, I can't remember if it's about 10, but I would say 10 out of 10 tunes was a hit. But I look at a lot of YouTube, and I think Vaughn and others can break down some of the difficult theories that you learn in science. You always see them talk about the carbon. Well, I was looking and they said the atom is actually the first trinity. The atom makes up everything, the neutron, the electron, and the proton. Some of you know me as the solar enthusiast. When you talk about photovoltaics, it's the electrons that get moved from the energy of the sun that cause electricity.

1:24:42 Sometimes, right here in our own, amongst us, people can explain things in a way that our youth can really grasp it. And I think Akibeka, in breaking down a lot of difficult theories in his own way and from his reading, it can help you to understand a lot of things. And as time goes along, I learn what he was actually talking about, sometimes from other scholars. And I say, wait, Maureen was talking this 10 years ago. So yes, we can emulate our own and still teach our own children based on some of his lyrics. Thank you.

1:25:19 And I just want to add, this is proven in data that typically when we teach our own, they excel far better than when they are taught by others. okay and so it is very critical because we all are teachers okay and some of us think because you have a degree that makes you a teacher it does not right he was a teacher okay and he was able to translate into music a lot of concepts that gives light and inspires human beings and that is very powerful I'd like to then move on to our next senator he is from st. Thomas as well he's joining us from the Earl B Atlee chambers senator Fonseca you are recognized for your four minutes yes thank you madam chair thank you madam chair can you hear me um i can hear you loud and clear senator fonseca you could proceed less than pleasant good morning to all of the distinguished testifiers i'm so impressed with the testimony we continue to give thanks and praises to the most high uh blessings blessings um today is is very um noter not not a very notoriety day because we celebrate um von benjamin you know we know them growing up midnight band um after we had lost bob marley there was that period in time and i think van and the midnight band had a similar type of lyrics you know i was going through the um the bill here and i noticed they were very prolific band 61 i albums midnight band and of course aki becca he had 11 albums over 1500 songs you know and they were a cruzion band not a jamaican band you know some people think they had a jamaican song i wanted to go to um

1:27:52 bevan smith i wanted to ask you a couple questions here um we know that you know the brother combination ron was on the bass and the keyboards tell us how ron complimented vaughn with his you know his lyrics how that bass and keyboard blended in with the lyrics of von well from what i know um bevan smith again and um i recall i did a documentary called the evolution of reggae music in the vi if you ever got a chance to go on youtube and check that out you'll see von and ronnie live back in um the mid-1990s um again when i first in that section he actually she was playing keyboards. And as Brother Wati here, Jared, would say, they'll always have dynamics together where Vaughn would go over to Ronnie, Ronnie would go over to Vaughn and do their little thing. The lyrics, you'll see that when Vaughn is singing, Ronnie is singing every word along with him, backing him up. And he had that higher-pitched voice where Vaughn was more tenor-like.

1:29:03 They inspired me because I also had dreams with my brothers to become a band. And when I look at them, I say that they actually did it. They actually did it. They were dedicated, dreadicated to the works and they really make it happen. So I

can't say exactly who wrote what and who didn't write what, but I know they gel together when they're on stage performance. And you could see that there was a lot of effort put in the lyrics to keep it the way it was. If you look at the documentary, the song Don't Move is a little different from the actual recording on Unpolished album. Again, it's because they put thought into it and made sure the right message that they wanted to portray on the album came out. So I'm not sure I'll answer your question. Maybe Jared could do a better job. He actually traveled with them.

- 1:29:52 But from my looking at the side, I say that they work well together. Vaughn, the prolific writer, Ronnie, was good with coming up with the bass line. And of course, he was a great keyboard player, composer, and everything had to be right. You know, I do dub poetry. I tried to do dub poetry with them one time, and they were teaching me how to do my dub poetry to sound right. So again, Ronnie, great artist. Vern, a great writer. Yes, thank you. And we know, too, that they came from a well-musical family, the father being a musician and the mother being a school principal.
- 1:30:33 Quickly, I wanted to go to Mr. Armstrong, Raymond Armstrong. Time. Madam Chair, can I just be allowed to finish up? You can proceed. You can proceed, Senator Fonseca. Thank you. Yes, Mr. Armstrong, tell me about the transition from midnight band to aki becca tell me what took place during that period of time where the transition from midnight to aki becca the transition basically was just you know elevation of of the journey you know and And for Vaughan, he's a very aggressive writer, you know.
- 1:31:28 One producer can't keep up with Akibeka, you know. And so I would guess to, you know, have the experience with other producers and promoters, And to take the music or his vision to another level, that's where the Akibeka was created through his reading and his research, you know, and that's where he decided he wanted to take his Saito, you know.
- 1:32:06 So I can't really to say, you know, answer directly, you know, and from midnight to Akibeka. But, you know, I can comfortably say it's a transition, you know, in the music. Thank you. Thank you. And thank you so kindly for the additional time, Madam Chair. I hope we have another burning question in another round because I do have another important question. Thank you very much for the time, Madam Chair. You're most welcome, Senator Fonseca. If there is a burning question, the Chair will indulge and allow that. Next, I would like to recognize Committee Vice, Chair, Senator Javon James Sr. for his four minutes.
- 1:33:02 Senator James Sr. Greetings to the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands. Thank you, Madam Chair, for the time. I stand in full support of Bill 35-0030. I want to say a special thank you to the Senate President. Senator, no, I'm not supposed to call the name of the Senate President. We all know who we're talking about, the boss. But I say all that to say is that today is a very great day while I watch the gallery. Because many times when we honor individuals, I look forward to see who's in a gallery it speaks a lot to who this individual was Vaughan to me was more than just an artist though he was a very wise man and he was wise beyond his years and to me he was more of a messenger and not really an entertainer or artist and you can't compare him to about Marley much respect about Molly much respect or Vaughn Vaughn's lyrics totally different you know when when when by Molly would say something in one line Vaughn would say two to three sentences in that same amount of time that by Molly would say why I love you all over the place now that was a little challenging part for them i think it was a little too fast however the rhythm it puts you in a vibration where how it bubble so when you hear the rhythm and you hear the lyrics as much as it's fast the pulse of the rhythm puts you in a situation where if you're another meditation you can hear what he's saying in other words this message was for individuals who wanted to receive it it was our energy it was a vibe and the reason why i can say that because i'm a big fan of
- 1:34:50 benjamin and midnight band while i was living in new york city that's way before i i came into this wall of mind of politics um the album on polish and i i really like the fact that you all highlighted it so many times i i know for sure that's one of his biggest albums and every single song if you really into reggae every single song on that album you could listen to that album over and over and while i was going through my dark times in new york going through so many things living my brother my brother was into the rastafarian faith you know but we still share those beliefs and he passed on some of those things to me and i say that to say is i found unpolished album in his apartment in new york and i took it for him i never returned it and that album like i said brought me through my darkest times you know i lost my dad and so many things been going on i wanted to leave the virgin islands because at the time it was just crazy and i went to new york thinking i'm going to turn into this big celebrity and get rich it didn't happen right back here in the virgin islands but mama africa and propaganda those are my two favorite tracks on the album um the reason why i like propaganda i'm not going to quote the lyrics i don't want to get into trouble today but i would advise anybody to listen to the song propaganda you know because when you really listen to that you see the fight of the black men not just in this community but all over the world and von benjamin no different from edward Wilma Blighton, no different from Marcus Garvey, no different from any of those guys. Deliver the message to the people without any fear. But my question though, if I'm not mistaken, I will ask you since you know a good amount of good amount about him. If I'm not mistaken, Von Benjeman never put his face on an album, right?

- 1:36:58 speaking to mate one there's only one that was early oh sorry name Dale Watty aka Ross Jared it was only one album and yeah it was just one picture I ever saw with Bo C and that was way back but after ban personally tell me this you don't want no destruction I'm a tall handsome guy I don't want to be distracted. It's a message. This is a personal thing Van tell me. Next thing he said to me, you don't see how I go on stage? You just go on stage, you don't like jump all over the place. Just stay so. Stay still and deliver. It wasn't about him.
- 1:37:47 It was the message. And that's what I was getting at. The humbleness. Most people they want to be the star boy and the album Vaughn never practiced that he was a very humble person he stayed in the back and let the message did the the work uh but madam chair if i could just wrap up quickly you may proceed senator i just want to wrap up by saying uh monks i and i was another big tune and music video that was featured in west and the reason why i had to bring it up today because while reading the bill it's such a coincidence people like um seagull was in that video as well much respect to seagull rest in peace but it's so such a coincidence when you see all those individuals in that music video for monks I and I and to know that this monument this monument for Barn Benjeman will be right there I know the people of Frederickstead would definitely appreciate it and in no other place whereas you could put it in Freedom City so with that said thank you mr. president for bringing this and big up to I think Edmond and I saw some other individuals who played in the band-rass element, that's how you know you as supposed to be my cousin, right? Family, respect. Thank you, Madam Chair, for the time.
- 1:38:57 Thank you so much, Senator James Sr. I want to take this opportunity to again commend the sponsor, the primary sponsor of this legislation, Senator Novel E. Francis Jr. In fact, we had tried to bring this legislation forward in the 34th legislature. And it was coming close to the end and he was working hard. And we looked at it and we said, you know what, let's hold it over for the 35th, God spare our life, so we could have a really robust discussion and not have it rushed. And that's what we are doing today. I noted that Vaughn was born on the island nation of Antigua, and so are my parents.
- 1:39:50 And I could trace back my roots. I have a great-great-grandmother. Her name is, her name was Idris Benjamin. And so we all are united, whether we know it or not, by those blood that runs through our veins. We may not know the connections and we haven't connected the dots, but they are there and they exist. That's why I look at all of us and I always say we are family.
- 1:40:24 Even when I was teaching, I said that we are family. I wanted to ask, I don't know who can answer this question. I noted in the whereas clause that his father and his siblings, they were musicians and they played in a band. Where did they start playing first? That's the thing I couldn't really put my finger on.
- 1:40:59 Who can tell me, Ms. Awathi, you look like you're itching to say. have been around them touring and promoting so you would know I'm hoping that you would know where they started out playing as music as musician this family this this family of musician where did they start Elwati aka Ras Jaret church amen amen I I had a strong suspicion you know but I I needed it to be on the record we all start in the church I know it that's where all good things come from it should come from there and that heart and that also level of spirituality as descendants of Africans and Africans we have a really strong spirit and a stronger connection to the most high all-powerful God and so I suspected that they started out playing in church we see a lot of musical talents here in the Virgin Islands as well as nationally and internationally and they hone this started their skills in church I'm glad that you were able to provide that now mr. Smith I wanted to get a from you because my brothers I have two brothers who are also of the Rastafari my two eldest and they had occasions to come over to St. Croix and we would reason one-on-one after they have had their experience and they would tell me how riveting this just a moment just the concert just to be around him they even
- 1:42:55 took pictures with him. I don't have them to share right now. I'm hoping that one of my brothers will send me a picture with them, both of my brothers, with Vaughn sitting down and just reasoning one and one. But tell me, how did you or do you, how did you interact, Mr. Smith, with him, knowing that, yes, he was educated, well-read, and he was able to impart instructions to you, knowing your passion in solar, what would be some of the things that he would like to see and be perhaps singing about in today, in this time and this season? Kevin Smith again, and I'm reflecting, and in fact, the last time I actually had a conversation with Vaughn, he was, Carl was with me. Carl who? Your brother Carl, Carl Joseph.
- 1:43:56 And, you know, I was, you know, Carl knew everybody, and I was like, the way he was talking with Vaughn, I said, but you found St. Thomas, you act like you know Vaughn more than me. You know, and then they were gone in the deep conversation. But Vaughn loved to talk about philosophy, you know, and how things work. And then at the fish market, everyone who knows me, Wes, Sigour and I, we played chess for hours. And Vaughn would be there kind of upset because he wanted us to stop playing chess and let's reason.
- 1:44:29 You know, so he'll come up with a lot of things about chess. You know, that game is this game. I said, come in now, we're finishing, we love to play chess. But he likes to talk about philosophy and how things work, and he was a deep

brother, and when he started talking about carbon, as I mentioned before, at the time, I really couldn't grasp what he was saying, but it was from the books he read and the experiences he had that he was able to break down how the carbon works. He liked to play with words. You have to be careful what words you use when you speak with Vern, because he'd turn it around and say, make you look like you're talking nonsense, you know? And he'd like to turn it around backwards so you find the true meaning of the word. So in reasoning with Vaughn, you'll learn a lot. And sometimes you don't learn it until maybe a year or two after.

1:45:20 And you say, this is what he was talking about, you know? And that's why I said I was stuck on Unpolished. I love some of his tunes. And the thing about Vaughn, he was a chanter and he was an excellent singer. When he started to sing, you realize that none of the mother reggae music have anything over him. One of my favorite singing songs of him is Midnight Ghetto. And he will make a song up in a minute. I wonder like, okay, when did you write that? He probably just wrote it as he heard the music. So in reasoning with Vaughn, and again, we used to talk on the soccer field a lot, and he used to really admire the skill of Deshawn and Senua that, you know, when they on the soccer field together, they played together and they really worked together and score a goal, and he was very, very proud of that.

1:46:09 You know, Senua, I'm glad he's here in the audience now. Come up to be a very, very athletic and natural young man, you know, and I'm glad that he's here to hear this honor that his father has bestowed not only to the Virgin Islanders, but to the whole global community. So again, you ask some difficult questions, but like I said, his philosophy, you know, his breakdown of his imperial majesty, you know. Some of us in the Rastafari faith, we go back and forth about the divinity of his majesty. He was clear on how he saw his majesty. And you notice most of his song, you know, one of them that I heard, it's going to slip me now, but it has to do with, he weathered the storm. And when I hear how, when you think about how his majesty weathered the storm against us, and when he put that into his lyrics it brings you a nice warm and fuzzy feeling like you say it's good meditation music that um i miss him today i call my mango tree aki and the other one becca and i talked to them every time i watered him and they went down the day he went into the ground and i'm looking forward to some great what you call haitian kidney mangoes and valencia give thanks thank you so much now I wanted to ask the next question this one is for you mr. Cotterington Rastafari as a religion is very humble sometimes you know individuals may think of Rastafari and they just see you with your locks. Some people don't wear their locks, but they see it. When Vaughn had conversations with you regarding that level of spirituality, how was it received with you and also members of the Rastafari movement and spiritual religion.

1:48:14 Madam Chair, I'm Phil Cadrington here on behalf of the EWF. Give thanks for your question, Madam Chair. One of the things that has remained with me in regards to memories I have of Vaughan was how he never made me feel less than him. And I recognize how great the brother is more and more. I hear something we're talking about it, like how certain things, I still unpack in some of the lyrics. They talk about the word.

1:48:51 Devon was talking about how he turned around the words and stuff like that. And in one of the songs, he has a thing where he says, is it morph or from, right? And I just unpacked this the other day, right? Morph is from spelled backwards, right? And this is all true. He's truly a wordsmith. I remember one day, I was talking to him about, there's a song called Basra. And I met him and I said is it true you wrote Basra for the bedroom in Iraq you know he said yeah I said a man on the internet saying you wrote Basra for them brothers in Iraq you know is that true he tell me yeah man you know you ain't you ain't see what happened when the war unfold over there and he start to say certain things and I tell him man me ain't well read like, that ain't no Bedrin. And he looked at me like, what are you putting down yourself for? Like, you're making this knowledge seem unattainable to you or something. And I have to say, that is something that has remained with me and it drives me about him. He never made me feel less than him at no time. No time. You talk about the Rastafari faith is a way of life, you know, and at no time, the bedroom never made me feel like don't approach him or, you know, I remember one day, another time, share another memory. He used to do his family laundry. He used to do laundry. I met him, I was going to do my laundry and he was there doing his laundry or his family's laundry. Let me get that straight, right? And I said to him, I said, And I said, Bedrin, me think them people in America understand what you sign, you know,

1:50:42 because I'd be having trouble unpacking, like the lyrics, your dialect, you check. And he look at me and he does kind of like, you know. I said, yeah, I don't think them people fully unpacking what you sign, Bedrin, because me who dare, I'm having trouble and I'm asking him, what do you mean when you say, and such and such, you know. And he said, man, you know, it's just how we express it at times. You know, it might come off a little more thick. So he said sometimes it come off like in Crip because it just, the accent come off so thick at the time, you know. So I just give thanks that I had the opportunity to reason with the budgering on many occasions. And he inspired me to look within myself and don't never put myself down at no time. And no time he showed me that. Don't never see yourself as less than to no one, no time. You know, so that's what I would give recognition and remembrance to of the bedroom at this moment, you know.

Give thanks. I don't know if I answered your question, but give thanks.

- 1:51:45 You definitely answered my question thoroughly. So rest assured, because that's something that was needed to be said on the record about the level of humility. Let me tell you, for Rastafaris, I always count on them. I don't know about anybody else. I remember one, just because you spoke, because one time I was feeding some elders, we couldn't get into the lunchroom, guess who opened the door? And it was only in the morning, only in the morning, and so I give thanks for that, because I know the heart, I know the humility, like I said, I have two elder brothers who are, And they have that demeanor of humbleness, of unity, of love, of peace. Thank you.
- 1:52:41 Senator Nobel Francis, Jr., you're recognized. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm hoping that I'm going to get equal time as the chair. You may proceed, sir. Thank you very much. You're killing it. So I really want to say thank you to all the testifiers and your great comment, as well as my colleagues in what appears to be supportive of moving this measure forward. And I can't see no reason why not anyway.
- 1:53:15 But, you know, we stand on shoulders of our parents. And it's important that we understand. I heard the question that asked when the skills was recognized. I grew up in a house where my father was from Antigua so we listened to Ronnie Benjamin in our home so he grew up into a family as well that was musicians I attended school with with Ronnie and Shanette and Altia and and Vaughn where while Vaughn is being recognized today those other siblings have great skills as well I remember hearing Shanette sing in school and again I mean blew the roof off we always love to hear her and her sister sing in school you know at times I like I said I hung out with with a lot of times with Ronnie you know so we were almost called brothers at times, and then my brother Buddha looked like Vaughn.
- 1:54:22 So, I mean, there was opportunity for people to confuse us in growing up, and that's why we always refer to each other as brothers. In 2014, when I decided to run for office, I seek Ronnie out, and he put together my first jingle. Again, just showing the association of what's happening here today. So while we're really having this discussion, I think that I too want to pay respect and homage to the parents, Ronnie and Ann Vons and Shanette and Altia's parents, because they too was instrumental in his upbringing.
- 1:55:04 I get all kinds of texts here. I heard from one, at least one of our workers here in the media, you know, to talk about the fact that Alwyn Baptiste, which most of us know, where he talked about the fact that Midnight was his first recording session as an engineer in the studio in Christian Stead. Brother there. So, you know, what we're hearing here today, and I know it's long overdue, and I will certainly admit to that, but growing up, right, We take different parts. They went on to music and I became the Babylon. A lot of times when I sat down in the fish market on Saturdays, the Babylon show up. But again, these are how I go in there was no stranger to them because of course, we all grew up together in this community. So, the Babylon is moving this measure today to make sure that my brother get recognized.
- 1:56:11 Give thanks, give thanks, yes sir, give thanks. So, it's really a good feeling. And, you know, I pray that his children have an appreciation for the contribution of their father. Because he meant a lot. meant a lot to all of us i see some of his band members as well that's here today and um you know it's it's all a collective right you know midnight is just not made up of von it's not just made up of ronnie but there are so many other component of of that banner that makes up the whole so we we give respect and honor to them as well for their contribution.
- 1:57:04 I wanted to ask though, can anyone speak to what you believe that really, because you have to be at the right sphere, because he's always at that, Vaughn was always at the higher sphere, right? What would you say that really evoke emotions out of Vaughn. You know, he always seems to just, you know, just move in a certain level, and if you're not at that level with him, he just keep moving. What do you see as something that really troubled him in this community, that you believe that, you know, when he sung his songs, because a lot of times when we compare him to Bob Marley, you know, he had conscious music about things that's happening in our world at that time.
- 1:57:51 You know, I think I saw where, me and Bob Marley, lot of times he'll talk about the Bible and Bible verse but for Vaughn and Midnight Band it was always what's happening within the world and deeply analyzing and being analytic to what's happening in our world and that put that into a song so anyone could talk about the frame of mind what do you believe angered Vaughn Akibecker about this community? Anyone could answer? I mean all those in the mic if you if you wish to come in then certainly we could we could invite you in if need be. No no no no you're going to have to come in sit right here you can sit right here by Mr. Armstrong sit right here by Mr.
- 1:58:42 Armstrong right there if you just put your name put your name on the record as well that's a good day my name is Edmond Felto that question what angered him how could someone like this leave this is my question how could someone like this leave who are friends and family or close friends when big places who in high places how can someone like this leave you know we're going to say next how come someone like this leave with no recognition my brother is down in the ground right now I travel the world with him if you all didn't know me and some lot of other band members who are here

travel the world with him so what angered him how can we watch what is going on in our Virgin Islands and our leaders know what is going on and pretend like we don't know. Who have the keys to the city of the Virgin Islands right now? What are the lyrics in these songs that the people who have the keys to the city? The words that Von Benjamin expresses is not just Rastafari, it's not Rastafari, it's the way that we all know what we should be living and everybody know it but we as a people we choose who we want to be places and we choose who we want to be and what and you help who you want to help when we're gonna stop there are much people like von benjamin around no hey much like that let me see a singer you can bring right now and sing a song and make it right here i have been in studios and make whole albums with him in two days albums that people take years to make oh you could let someone like that leave and pretend like you don't know oh man come here to speak nice and pretty how could someone like that leave and pretend like it's nothing and the world recognize him the world look on the internet the world recognize him everybody does say say say say talk talk talk but when you come and do is a whole different thing. Just like Aaliyah Johnson and a lot of different people, Boston, there are a lot of

2:01:08 people like that in the Virgin Islands. But you don't care for them, you throw them away. They're people with skill and talent, disbelief. And until we the people of the Virgin Islands who have a whole island for ourselves to run, we can't say it's the white people, it's European is it this is it that we can't say that we the people here we make the laws here why do we why are we still in the same stupidity huh this building here we don't reason come in here this building here is where all the activity that take place maybe I should start to come visit a little more often you know so let me let me um at least what what what you played in the band what was position? My position in the band was just the guitar player. Guitar player. Yes sir. So please note that number one I want to thank you for your contribution there and like I say I believe that the band was more than Vaughn and Ronnie you know there's many components that made up the band and you know everything is within time and certainly we thank you for your contribution. I believe that the time is right for us to be able to pay respect to this brother Aki Becker and you know feel free if you have other individuals that you like to recommend that this body should consider we're very very open to do that as well yes sir there's Lyle Henry nothing going on without Ailey who's that Ailey Lyle Henry nothing going on without Ailey the driver of the bus if you think that's not important the driver of the bus the cook of the food the one who does everything that nobody sees everybody does see light camera action these people Eddie and Elena well let's not take

2:02:58 away from Vaughn today though you know there's less we willing to have that discussion and I as well as any other senator you could certainly approach and we could build the information to make sure that those individuals are recognized but today is truly you know Vaughn Benjamin Aki becker's day and we really want to keep the focus on him today because you know his contribution is immense and you know today's his day I'm sorry you asked me a question no no no no no we good we good we good we good I just share with you that that you know I mean I wanted to know I mean exactly what what some of those issues were because that helped to drive his composition and putting those songs together and putting them into lyrics so we appreciate your your contribution to Thank you. All right. Give thanks.

2:03:47 All love. So Madam Chair, again, I ask for my colleagues' support, and this is a very important measure where we're paying tribute and recognition. We had many contemplation, maybe doing a concert, maybe doing something else or whatever, to recognize this work. And we still want to make sure that the rest of the Midnight Band, certainly Rani and others too, get their due in appropriate time. Thank you very much for the time and opportunity.

2:04:17 Thank you so much, Senator Francis. Any other committee member has a burning question? Senator Fonseca, I see you raising your hand in the chambers. You may proceed with your burning question. Yes, thank you so kindly, Madam Chair. I just wanted to ask, um, Dale, um, Ross Jarrett, cause you know, the band was so prolific, 1500 songs. Tell us a little bit what went into writing the songs when, um, you know, Vaughn and Ting wanted to write a song, what was the process, how long it took, or he was just naturally talented. Give us how this, give us a scenario of how the songs were being written.

2:05:09 A.Y.T. A.K.A. Ross Gerard. Give thanks for asking that question. Vaughn was a special writer. And if I sit here and tell you, in regards to the writing of Vaughn Benjamin, Vaughn's brain is, he functioned on the left side of his brain. And functioned on the left side of your brain, you will start to tap into something that normal people will not tap into.

2:05:36 We have two sides of our brain, of the right and the left. Looking at Vaughn, me knowing Vaughn as a spiritual being, not a physical, I always look at him as spirit. The way Vaughn articulate music, I give you an example. I pick Vaughn up, we went to New Mexico to do the current album. And we picked him up at the airport. I said, Vaughn, would you like something to eat? No, I come to work. We go straight to the studio. And songs was built, wasn't written before. As he reached in the studio, he took a pen. Start right, run the rhythm, right.

- 2:06:17 Stop, go in the booth. Next. He didn't hear me back again. By evening, that album was done. And when I listened to the album, current, listen to it, the guy with the jewel eyes, That was me. The context of this brother, I have seen him left shows. Two o'clock in the morning, I went to studio where I have another show with him the next day. I was there with him, but I was sleeping because I know I have to be ready.
- 2:06:55 Six o'clock in the morning when we ride in going back up the road, five songs done laid down. No one in this history of music I ever saw articulated music like that. As Edmund say, it takes people months to do an album. Vaughn do an album in a day. And I've seen that with my own eyes. So no one can sit here and say, how Vaughn write these lyrics? He's just an educated, good writer, and his brain is working good. And he did great works for the music. Give thanks.
- 2:07:31 Give thanks and praises to the Most High, Joe Rastafari, and thanks to the Bill Sponsor, Madam Chair, blessings. Yes, I give thanks. Senator Francis Heiliger, do you have a burning question? Okay. Okay, there's a photo up, and if we could have media put it up, I mentioned earlier that I have two elder brothers, I'm the last of my mother's children. There's my eldest brother, he is seated to the right of Vaughan, he has his finger up it looks like that's my eldest brother Carl Joseph who Bevan Smith Mr. Smith mentioned and seated on the left is my elder brother Desmond we call him Shaka Zulu and of course in the middle is none other than Mr. Vaughn Akibeka Benjamin my brothers were big fans and so was I because my brothers would come and share the lyrics with me, to reason with me, especially because they knew how important I found music to be, because it inspires me, just like poetry, because that's what he was writing, and he used that to sing, as well as visual artistry, which is art.
- 2:09:15 So those are my two brothers there, and I think they kind of resemble, all three of them resemble each other. Thank you so much, Media, for putting up that photo. Is there any other questions? Senator James Sr., you're recognized. Yes, Madam Chair. It has nothing to do with the resolution, it's just something I wanted to know. anyone can tell me this I know he produced a lot of songs we caught a lot of songs but like you know like Tupac way after Tupac died he's still here like releasing our songs I just want to know if anybody is aware if you have more content more music out there unpublished music and is so just simply say yes so we could look forward to hearing more of our Menjee Man do you know that music is coming out as we speak all now every day go on the internet fun is here spiritually with us and he's producing the music is coming up more than those are here I want you to listen to me very carefully I'm gonna say this last thing. Jamaica. Vaughn has inspired Jamaica. Let me tell you who the singers are. The last half of Janain, Kabaka Pyramid, what's the big, the other one?
- 2:10:51 When I was in Jamaica, and when Vaughn was standing talking, all of them was in a circle listening to my brother. All of them. So the influence of Vaughn Benjamin, it's powerful. I'm being a testimony to y'all today, if y'all never seen it. The way people cry for him. The way people ask for him. If you go on the internet, I open my phone right now, go on the internet, you're going to see Vaughn every day. So his music is constantly coming out, more than people who's here in the flesh. Next thing I want to say is, there's no, and if I say anything wrong, please correct me so I don't say anything wrong anymore. There's no genre of music out there that has music like Vaughn Benjamin. Rap, jazz, R&B, reggae, hip-hop, name it, country, calico. No genre out there has music like Vaughn, Benjamin, please let's take that in consideration. No genre. If Vaughn Benjamin was to ever go on a Grammy, he'd take everything. His lyrics, his writing, no one ever wrote for him.
- 2:12:15 think about that those y'all saying 70 something album find a hundred and something albums that he wrote himself no one have wrote anything for van thank you so with that said I want to say thank you for that I am a fan and I just I'm very I I'm into music like when daddy Freddy passed away I know he's a different genre but he his his legacy ended right there as far as music and And I'm always interested in finding out, because it tells a lot about the work ethics of the artist. So thank you for placing that on the record. And may his name forever live on unto the family. Thank you for sharing him with the world and for sharing him with the Virgin Islands community.
- 2:12:57 Thank you. Thank you so much. I don't want to overshadow who we are speaking about today. But I also worked with Trevor Nicholas Friday, another Antiguan, and he was a very powerful man. I know his legacy still lives on with a number of the current musicians today. And I'm sure the same is going to be, and is, as you indicated, Mr. Mathey, is Wathi. It is living on today. one thing, you know, people will have a lot of riches, you know, wealthiest people, but once you positively touch somebody's life, your legacy is ensured to live on from that day into probably eternity. Chances are. And I see that the gentleman today who we are honoring, as well as the band is their legacy is here and is living on now I will recognize the proponent of this measure senator Francis you're recognized oh thank you very much madam chair I just really wanted to conclude it by thanking Jeanette Kennedy Gator his sister for working along with my office and putting together the content for the resolution and kind of being the point person within the family to to get all of this together and um have us here today so i wanted to publicly um just give thanks to her for her contributions in that chenette canny gato thank you very much madam chair again i want to reiterate and ask for my colleague support in this

measure um you know it's this it's quite fitting and i know that that um you have an opportunity to give you a closing statement but while this has been long overdue I believe that

2:15:08 the time is right you know there's some other course of action that we want to take in order for us to be able to continue to recognize a contribution and we're talking about that maybe the creation of a scholarship fund we're talking about probably you know somewhat of a museum that that could be how's some of the content involved with Midnight Man, you know, we were certainly put on the map with Midnight all over the globe, and I agree, I agree that more should have been done beforehand, you know, however, there's no wrong time to do the right thing, you know, so I think that there is some opportunity to right the ship and make sure that his contributions and the contribution of the um can i ask those individuals that also uh played with the midnight band to at least stand and be recognized real quickly if we could just shine the camera thank you thank you again um media if we just got shocked thank you very much all the family members um if you too could just just stand real quick i know I know that we had asked the children to stand before, but if all the family members could just stand at home real quick and be recognized. Thank you, thank you, thank you very much for that.

2:16:34 Thank you, Madam Chair, for the time and opportunity. Thank you so much, Mr. President. I would like to recognize at this moment the presence in the St. Thomas Chamber, Earl Bialy Chamber of Committee Member, Senator Samuel Carrion. Senator Carrione, welcome and a pleasant good afternoon. Madam Clerk, kindly note Senator Carrione as being present and indicate our voting strength for today. Madam Chair, we have five members present. Thank you so kindly. Senator Carrione, you're recognized if you have any wish to ask any questions of the testifiers. Thank you, Madam Chair, thank you very much. Good morning, afternoon now to my colleagues, to the testifiers, everyone who is present in the chambers on St. Croix, the viewing and listening audience today.

2:17:40 This is clearly a very good day, a great day indeed, I would say. We know this has been long, long overdue. I want to commend the sponsor of this measure. We've had conversations with regards to it, even with some of the members of the Federation. So I am excited to see that we're finally here and that we will recognize one of our own that has not only contributed locally, but internationally, globally, all over the world has been recognized and has taken the Virgin Islands with him everywhere that he has gone. So I want to just express my gratitude to the family, my gratitude to the members of the band, those that over the years have worked with him for allowing him and lending him not only to the Virgin Islands, but to the world.

2:18:47 And clearly his lyrics, his songs will live on. And today by this vote that I'm also joining in the sponsor of the measure and asking my colleagues for support. His legacy and memory will continue to live on in Frederick Stead, and we will ensure that his story and his legacy will continue. I really like the idea of the scholarship. Mr. President, you can count with me. Anything that we can do to support, we're here for it. So thank you.

2:19:23 Long overdue, but we're here. It's a good day for the Virgin Islands. Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you so much, Senator Carrion. At this time, I'm going to allow Senator Francis Heiliger, you are going to make a comment. No, I'm just waiting to vote. Okay. Thank you so kindly. At this time, we'll allow the testifiers to present some closing remarks. We'll start with you, Mr. Cotterington. You start off everything, 30 seconds.

2:20:03 Thanks, Madam Chair. I want to recognize the Senate President, he's not sitting here right now, but for the initiative. I want to recognize Senator Carrion as well, who, when this initiative started, an individual, I didn't see him here, Jason Joseph, who came forward and wanted to give recognition to Mr. Benjamin. It was Mr. Carrion we approached, who was the chair of that committee at the time, to have it done, and at that time, all we were trying to do was get permission to bill on the property. It wasn't to get any approval from the government.

2:20:44 There was a movement in the community to honor Vaughan without the government, But where they wanted to put the monument or the recognition, it was government property. And couldn't have it constructed without the approval of the government. And it sent us down this path to where we reach here today, Madam Chair. So it's a long time coming, nothing before a time. I also want to make mention of Ron Benjamin, whom I knew personally as well. You know, I had a relationship with Ronnie. I know him as well. I would stick something on there real quick, you know, because I remember having a conversation with him about where he was getting his inspiration from, and it was surprising, the answer he gave me. I never forgot it. He said he gets inspiration from Sparrow, you know. So that was something that stayed with me. So I want to give recognition to Ron Benjamin, whom I knew and had a relationship with, knowing personally all the members of the band, on behalf of the Ethiopian World Federation, whom I'm here on behalf of the executive committee, the vice president is here along with me. I give thanks to the legislature, to the government, the administration and everyone here in support of this global figure. Make no mistake Vaughan is a global figure. I don't think the Virgin Islands has produced a more popular individual. Kenya, Africa, South Africa, you name it, they know this brother and his popularity just continues to grow. So Madam Chair, on behalf of the EWF, all the brothers here, his

family, and all the people that love Vaughan Benjamin throughout the world, I give thanks and I want to say I hope we can see this happen in due time, give thanks. And thank you so much, Mr. Cotterington, for those powerful closing remarks.

2 : 22 : 28 Mr. Wathi, Mr. Wathi, you are recognized for your 30 seconds closing remarks. Yeah, it's an honor for me and a pleasure to be here and to see something happening. I could feel the fire of my brother. I could feel the fire. I could feel the fire. Because they put in a lot of work. So excuse them when they're expressing. Because it's very important, we know the importance. So for each and every one of y'all who's taking the time out today to make this happen, whether it's through the government, me I'm not a too governmental person, the first time I ever come in here I have to ask the address how to get here. And I live on St. Croix. So let's take that in consideration.

2 : 23 : 13 Me being here today with all you is a blessing. Okay? And maybe I need to come in here some more. Okay? So, to conclude, please, I'm asking, in the name of the most, I, Kadamawi, Haile Selassie, Exidebe, Marsagana, Negus, Niggas, Kadamawi, I, King Selassie, I, Ja, Rastafari, To the family, to his children, the legacy and the work he's put out, please, please I'm asking y'all, not y'all, y'all are with it, but whoever is going to make that final decision, I'm asking in the name of my ancestors to make this go true for us.

2 : 23 : 57 we need it I support it 100% please family my name is Ross Jared I am from Natural Vibes House of Rastafari representing today with the ancestors and Van Akibeka on my back okay I love each and everyone guidance and protection and I pray that this go forward for the sake of everyone bless the love And thank you so much, Mr. Wathi, for those riveting remarks. Mr. Bevan Smith, you are recognized for your 30 seconds closing remarks.

2 : 24 : 41 Yes, good thanks, Bevan Smith. First, I'd like to thank the bill's sponsor. Even though we had a little delay back in 22, he stuck with it. And I actually thought it was over and decided to just do a poem. And thank you, Chairperson, Chairwoman, Carla Joseph, and the Vice Chair, and everyone else on the virtual Internet. I'd just like to say one thing in addition to a scholarship, because the brother mentioned there's so many more Akibeka's around, with the support of this body to maybe have an annual concert in memory of Akibeka to kind of highlight some of the artists. Maybe you might want to consider that in the near future. I'd also have to leave with a, I do some poetry myself, and Von Benjamin, Akibeka, a musical luminary, from Virgin Island Shore, his legacy we see, unpolished debut, roots hardcore, St. Croix's son, an island lore, a profound wordsmith, global acclaim, yet humility embrace his enduring fame, amidst flame and glow, he'll quietly stand, No hint of stardom, just a father and son. Thank you.

2 : 25 : 57 Thank you so much, Mr. Smith, for that poem. That's a very, very powerful poem. I definitely would like to get a copy of it. And definitely, last but not least, Mr. Armstrong, you are recognized for your 30 seconds closing remarks. A blessed day, give thanks. Give thanks, give thanks to everybody who's showing up. We're gonna continue doing what we're doing to tribute our brother.

2 : 26 : 33 You know, this is our life. And we're gonna do what we are able to do are able to do to see that our brother walks is carried on. We are a little late, but better late than never. We all are doing our part, the Rastafarian community, the indigenous community, the family. to tribute the Brother Vaughan Benjamin Akibeka and I'm also doing my part to continue the tribute and maintaining tributing Akibeka, the music, the band, the producers, players of instrument. Every Sunday on 101.3 Row FM you can listen to Akibeka Soundstation International with the Juggling Bushman tributing Akibeka to the world. Blessed day.

2 : 27 : 57 Thank you for that testimony as well Mr. Armstrong I'm going to tune in. Some day ago we were on a tour and nothing else they were playing but Midnight Bannon this was I think it was last week Monday or so we were on a tour and tour bus they were just playing Midnight Band I was like oh is it Vaughn's birthday is it somebody's birthday because all I was hearing was the Midnight Band playing.

2 : 28 : 29 That tribute in our community. Members in the community got bus drivers, taxi drivers, you've got vendors, shop owners, when you go into a store you're hearing midnight playing, when you're going in a taxi you're hearing midnight playing, even when you're going on a plane you're hearing midnight playing. So we're doing our best to continue the tribute and the acknowledgement of the works of Aki Becker the Great. And this resolution is one part of it, and to keep his legacy and life still burning true.

2 : 29 : 04 Do I hear a motion? Senator Javon James Sr., you're recognized. Thank you, Madam Chair. On behalf of the bill's sponsor, Senator Novelli Francis Jr., I move that Bill 35-0030, an act honoring and commending Vaughan Benjamin, pursuously for his contributions to reggae music in the Virgin Islands and the global communities appropriating \$45,000 to the Department of Sports, Parks, and Recreation for the design and construction of the Vaughan Benjamin Monument and naming waterfront park west of the Marley Homes, the Vaughan Akibeka Memorial Park. Be voted out of the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection and be forwarded to the Committee

on Rules and Judiciary for further consideration. I so move. Second. Bill number 35.0030 has been favorably moved by Senator Javon E. James Sr., seconded by Senator Samuel Carrion, Senator Alma Francis Heiliger. Roll call on bill number 35-0030. Senator Samuel Carrion? Yes. Senator Carrion? Yes. Senator Ray Fonseca? Yes. Senator Fonseca? Yes. Senator Alma Francis Heiliger? Yes. Senator Frances Heiliger, yay. Senator Kenneth L. Gittins, Senator Gittins, absent. Senator Javon E. James Sr., Senator James Sr., yay. Senator Carla J. Joseph, yes. Senator Joseph,

2:31:06 yay. Senator Milton E. Potter, Senator Potter, absent. Madam Chair, you have five yays, two absent. Thank you, Madam Clerk. Bill number 35-0030, an act honoring and commending Vaughn Benjamin posthumously for his contributions to reggae music in the Virgin Islands and the global communities, appropriating \$45,000 to the Department of Sports, Parks, and Recreation for the design and construction of the Vaughn Benjamin Monument and naming the waterfront park west of Marley Homes, the Vaughan Aki Beka Memorial Park, has been favorably voted upon in the Committee on Government Operations, Veteran Affairs, and Consumer Protection and will be forwarded to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary for further action and consideration. We really want to take this opportunity to thank everyone and at this time I will recognize the bill sponsor Senator Francis for your point of personal privilege. Thank you very much Madam Chair for the time I want to thank my colleagues for the support of this very important measure and also also thank the testifiers. I want to thank the family, again, for cooperating to move this measure forward as well. I know that there have been some unscabbed wounds removed here today, but we have to ensure that the work that has been done by Akibeka, Vaughn Benjamin, is not in vain. It's not in vain, and we continue to pay honor and homage to

2:33:00 this great gentleman, and also to his family, as well as the Midnight Band. So thank you very much for this time and opportunity. And again, we have to work collectively to recognize those other individuals that have made their mark in this community as well. Thank you very much, Madam Chair, for the time. God bless. Thank you so much, Mr. President. At this time, we will release all of the testifiers from your testimony before the Committee on Government Operations, Veteran Affairs, and Consumer Protection. The committee will adjourn from formal setting at this time, and we will be going on a tour of the Lieutenant Governor's office in Synchro. I want to take this opportunity to thank all of the media, our central staff, and of course my staff and other testifiers, those who joined us here in the conference room, as well as those who joined us remotely.

2:34:08 And also I wish everyone a happy Holy Week, enjoy your Holy Week, give thanks to the Most High for all that he has done and he continued to do in our lives. The Committee on Government Operations, Veteran Affairs and Consumer Protection meeting for For today, March 26 is hereby adjourned. Work is in trouble I'm a giddy and chance So a peace of appropriation Goodness and mercy Driven from the minds Of the people lamentation Josiah, diggy fam Josiah, and mercy Josiah Father said nice Goodness and mercy It's like a murder Demag a charge A biochemical industry Demag run from cultivation Goodness and mercy Driven from the minds of the people Lamentations Josiah Deliver me Josiah Have mercy Josiah Mother send high some goodness and mercy Send high some goodness Send high some goodness and mercy Love the life you live Lead the life you love You love the life you live, lead the life you love, lead the life you love. The mountains of Africa, they are familiar to me. You see the black suns of bush, we were scattered everywhere for as far as the islands.

2:36:13 But we are from the mountains of the moon, Kilimanjaro, ro-ho, Kilimanjaro, ro-ho, Kill a Manjaro More and sweet, more evil Kill a Manjaro So feel the life we live Lead the life we love Feel the life we live Lead the life we love Lead the life we love Lead the life we love No tears You don't shed no tears You don't shed no tears No tears Sing, sing Your body is your temple Your one and only temple Your body is your temple Your one and only temple You are living in the holy places Of the tabernacle of the most light You are living in the holy places It's up the top of the knuckle of the most high, yeah. Love the life you live.

2:37:25 Lead the life you live. Love the life you live. Feed the life you live. You lead the life you live. Feed the life you live. Humanitarians, those of you saving all the animals. Humanitarians, remove the skill from your hands. I see if in waves, I'm saying, what about humanity, remove the skill from her eyes. Oh, love the life you live, lead the life you love. Love the life you live, lead the life you love. Don't shed no tears. you're doing no tears no tears you're doing no tears when I cry I cry dry when I cry I cry dry when I cry I cry dry I love the life you live I live the life you love I live the life you love We'll be right back. Thank you.

2:39:43 We'll be right back. Thank you. From the minds of the people of lamentation, Josiah, believe in me, Josiah, have mercy, Josiah.

2:40:52 Father, send high some goodness and mercy, hey, send high some goodness, send high some goodness and mercy, hey. The mountains of Africa, they are familiar to me. You see the blocks of the bush, we were scattered everywhere for as far as the eye could see. But we are from the mountains of the moon Kilimanjaro, oh-oh Kilimanjaro, oh-oh Kilimanjaro, oh-oh More unsweet, more evil Kilimanjaro So we love the life we live Lead the life we love We love the life we live

Lead the life we love Lead the life you love, lead the life you love No tears, you don't shed no tears, you don't shed no tears No tears, sing, sing Your body is your temper, your one and only temper Your body is your temper, your one and only temper You are living in the holy places of the tabernacle of the most light, ya You are living in the holy places of the tabernacle of the most light, ya Love the life you live Leave the life you love Love the life you live

2 : 42 : 45 Feed the life you love You need the life you love Feed the life you love Humanitarians, those of you saving only animals Humanitarians, remove the skill from your eyes Humanitarians, see if in ways I'm saying, what about humanity? Remove the skill from your eyes Love the life you live Leave the life you love Love the life you live, lead the life you love Don't shed no tears, you don't shed no tears When I cry, I cry dry When I cry, I cry dry When I cry, I cry dry When I cry, I cry dry Love the life you live Lead the life you love You lead the life you love Lead the life you love Lead the life you love Lead the life you love Hey, hey, hey, hey you are living in the holy places of the tabernacle plo vh Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. You

People named in this transcript

SUSPECTED, and a finding aid only. Names were matched by machine against the spellings used across all 426 of our transcripts, and the title is the one used in the room. Being named here is NOT evidence that a person attended or spoke - only that the name was said. Speech recognition mishears names, so a spelling may be wrong even where no alternative is offered.

11x	Senator Alma Francis-Heyliger heard in this transcript as: Alma Francis Heiliger, Frances Heiliger, Francis Heiliger
10x	Senator Samuel Carrion heard in this transcript as: Carrion, Carrione
8x	Senator Carla Joseph the surname alone also matches: Clifford Joseph; Karla J. Joseph heard in this transcript as: Carla J. Joseph, Joseph
8x	Senator Ray Fonseca heard in this transcript as: Fonseca
7x	Senator Marise C. James the surname alone also matches: Javan James; Giovanni James Sr heard in this transcript as: James, James Sr
7x	Senator Milton E. Potter heard in this transcript as: Potter
7x	Senator Novelle Francis heard in this transcript as: Francis, Nobel Francis Jr., Novel E. Francis Jr, Novelli Francis Jr
6x	Senator Javan James heard in this transcript as: Javon E. James Sr, Javon James Sr
6x	Senator Kenneth L. Gittens heard in this transcript as: Gittins, Kenneth L. Gittins
2x	Senator Samuel Carillon heard in this transcript as: Carillon

Bills and acts referred to

Matched by number against our own acts corpus. The number is what the recognition heard, so it may be wrong; where it resolved, the title is the one the Legislature gave the act.

Referred to but not found in our acts corpus: Bill 35-0226, Bill 35-0223, Bill 35-0030