

Honorable Donna Christensen and members of the House Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you in this setting to convey the views of the De Jongh-Francis administration as regards H.R. 53. By way of introduction, I am Leona Smith, a resident of St. John and the appointed Administrator of this island.

The delegate's bill H.R. 53 authorizes the Interior Secretary to enter into a long-term lease with the Virgin Islands Government to provide land on this island for the establishment of a school. As I am sure you will hear or have heard from other witnesses who will testify at tonight's hearing the DeJongh-Francis administration wholly supports the securing of the land that is necessary for the construction of a school on St. John. The administration looks forward to passage of the bill and the subsequent negotiations towards identifying the most suitable location for the school's development. I cannot emphasize enough the need for the process to get underway in earnest that will lead to the construction of a new school on St. John.

The residents of this island have for years commuted very early in the morning and very late at night to and from our neighboring island of St. Thomas to facilitate their children's attendance of high school whether at private, parochial or at public institutions of learning. The construction of a new school would end this daily commute, one that is often challenged by inclement weather, rough seas and transportation snafus, for many families who have made St. John their home.

I will defer to the Acting Superintendent of schools for the St. Thomas-St. John district, Lisa Hassell-Forde to provide the panel with more details on the need to establish a school on St. John. I thank Delegate and members of the House Subcommittee on the Insular Affairs for the opportunity to convey the administration's position in full support of a long-term lease with V.I. National Park on St. John for the development of a school which will better serve the residents of this island.