

The Virgin Islands Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc.

Testimony

of

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before the

**33rd Legislature of the U.S. Virgin Islands
Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services
Senator Oakland Benta, Chair**

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**Earl B. Ottley Legislative Hall
Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas,
U.S. Virgin Islands**

Good afternoon, Senator Benta, Chair of the Committee, other committee members, other members of the 33rd Legislature present, other testifiers, members of the media, other community members present and the listening audiences. My name is Yvonne Petersen, Territorial Executive Director of the Virgin Islands Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc, referred to as the DD Council. It is indeed an honor and privilege for me to come before the Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services to provide a brief overview of the DD Council, who we are, what we do, the important role the DD Council currently plays and moreso the potential role it can play to address the needs of individuals with developmental disabilities and their families in the Virgin Islands.

The DD Council is one of the 56 Councils throughout the state and territories charged to address the most pressing needs of the developmental disabilities (or DD for short) as mandated by the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 (the DD Act. Along with our DD Network Partners, the Disability Rights Center of the Virgin Islands and the Virgin Islands University Center on Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, we work towards the DD Act is realized in the Virgin Islands.

The key purpose of the DD Council is to ensure that individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families are able to participate in service and program design and have access to needed community service that increases integration and independence in community life through advocacy, capacity building and system change activities.

Through Advocacy, the DD Council has conducted four Self-advocacy/Parent Advocacy Conference in collaboration with the UVI's Caribbean Cultural Center bringing success stories of individuals with developmental disabilities or their families. In the area of Capacity Building, the DD Council has conducted non-profit management training to prepare individuals with developmental disabilities to establish and manage their own self-advocacy organization. In the areas of System Change, the DD Council complemented it's partner, the Disabilities Rights Center of the VI's initiative to address needs of the public transportation management system in the VI. In this effort, the DD Council adopted a public transportation policy, conducted an analysis of the entire Vitran fixed-route system on all three islands resulting in the in first ADA training for bus drivers. This was conducted in partnership with the Council's DD Network partners, Cornell University, Vitran management and its staff and other entities. The report, entitled Secret Shopper is available on our website, www.viddc.org.

Currently, the DD Council's work, includes, but not limited to the following initiatives or programs:

- Working with Vocational Rehabilitation to provide students participating in this pilot program with transitional and wrap-around services
- Expanding the Family-to-Family Health Care Centers program to the VI. The program titled, Family Voices, U.S. Virgin Islands that provides training for parents of children

with special health care needs and practitioners so they can both work together to address the needs of the children with special needs in the VI.

- Resulting from a our meeting with FEMA's not-for-profit representatives regarding priority needs in the VI, the DD Council is currently designing an on-line universal data collection system for the both of the referenced-programs. This data system will be utilized for all the Council's programs and other organizations we partner with.
- Another capacity building need is expanding grant writing training opportunities for our local not-for-profits interested in serving the disabilities population.

The DD Council's major challenge is accessing its resources to conduct program delivery services and assist in meeting the needs of its targeted population. The DD Council looks forward to a new course that places the VI in parity with all other DD Councils in their respective states and territories and allows the DD Council the capability and capacity to comply with its federal mandate without interference.

Thank you.