



University of the Virgin Islands

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Office of the President

October 15, 2018

Honorable Myron Jackson
President
32nd Legislature of the Virgin Islands
P. O. Box 1690
St. Thomas, USVI 00804

Dear Senate President Jackson:

We want to thank you for the significant and meaningful support you provided to the University of the Virgin Islands in the FY 2019 Budget. The funding for new programs and the increase in our operating budget will enhance the quality and forward movement of the University.

We are writing today to request your support for moving forward with the Senate's deliberation of the Free Tuition Bills that have been submitted to the Senate. It is imperative that this matter is addressed soon if it is to have any impact on those students and individuals who hope to attend college in the Fall of 2019. This innovative policy, once adopted, will make a tremendous difference in the future economic and educational development of the Virgin Islands. Presently the Virgin Islands lags behind all States in regards to the percentage of individuals with college degrees (11.4%). This reality stifles the economic development of the Territory and deprives businesses of the trained workforce that is necessary for them to remain and prosper. This policy will make higher education a priority for all Virgin Islanders and will send a resounding message that the government is willing to invest in their lives and their future.

The adoption of this policy will place the Territory and UVI as national leaders in higher education. Once implemented by the Government of the Virgin Islands, it will be the first Territory in the US to fund this innovative approach, following the lead of only one other State that provides tuition free Bachelor degrees. The University of the Virgin Islands will also be the first Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in the nation to offer free tuition to residents of its home State/Territory.

The University hereby requests that a Hearing of the Senate as a Whole be convened immediately so that this important initiative can be addressed. We realize that there are two different Bills on this topic that have been presented to the Senate, and this should serve as compelling evidence of how important it is for Legislature to move this matter forward. It is rare when a proposed legislation already has the support of Senators and the Governor, and a funding source has been identified. In a recent election poll conducted by the University, 64% of those polled were in favor of the Free Tuition Policy and only 14% opposed. Thus, there is widespread community support for this policy as well.

The University is willing to provide testimony and additional information once a Hearing is convened. This measure is one of the University's highest priorities and is included in the new strategic plan which should be approved by the Board this month.

Senate Myron Jackson

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As indicted above, in order for this measure to have an impact on students who are considering higher education for next Fall, it needs to be approved right away.

Thanks for your support of this critical matter, and please let us know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



David Hall

President

cc: Henry C. Smock, Esq.-Board Chairman, UVI Board of Trustees
Oran Roebuck Bowry-Board Trustee, UVI Board