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# Virgin Islands to Honor Reggae Legend Vaughn “Akae Beka” Benjamin with Monument and Park

**Lawmakers move to immortalize the musician's legacy through significant landmarks**

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**Vaughn “Akea Beka” Benjamin** By. JAHVTZ BLANTON

The contributions of Vaughn “Akae Beka” Benjamin to reggae music will be immortalized in Virgin Islands' history as lawmakers on the Senate Committee of Government Operations have voted to commission a monument and name a park in his honor.

If successfully signed into law, Bill 35-0030 will appropriate \$45,000 to the Department of Sports, Parks and Recreation for the design and construction of the “Vaughn Benjamin Monument, and the naming of the waterfront park west of Marley Homes in Frederiksted “The Vaughn ‘Akae

Beka' Memorial Park”.

The bill was sponsored by Senator Novelle Francis, who told his colleagues that “Akea Beka’s life cannot be measured by his industry awards and record sales. He was more than that. He was a lifelong learner, an 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.”

Niani Benjamin, an invited testifier, told committee members that “this bill is befitting of Vaughn Benjamin due in part to his legacy as an artist and his encouragement for lifelong learning and civic engagement.” Dale Wathey, a longtime friend of the deceased, agreed with Ms. Benjamin that he was a “suitable recipient for this honor.” Mr. Wathey, in his testimony, told lawmakers that “it's an honor that y'all are honoring Vaughn Benjamin.”

Similar sentiments were shared by Phil Codrington who testified on the local branch of the Ethiopian World Federation (EWF). He affirmed that the EWF supported the move to “ give Vaughn [the] recognition due to him in perpetuity.” Mr. Codrington remembered the many years spent as a friend of the man of the hour, who was also the lead vocalist of the band Midnite.

Bevan Smith, who introduced himself as a reggae music enthusiast, asserted that Mr. Benjamin was “the most prolific, globally accomplished and widely respected musician [to] ever come out of the Virgin Islands.” He commended Akea Beka’s dedication to his craft and unwavering humble demeanor.

The proposed legislation received overwhelming support from all five present members. Senator Alma Francis Heyliger considered Mr. Benjamin’s skills to be “astronomical,” while Senator Javan James Sr. admitted he was a big fan. The potential honor to be bestowed on Vaughn “Akea Beka” Benjamin will be next considered within the Committee on Rules and Judiciary.