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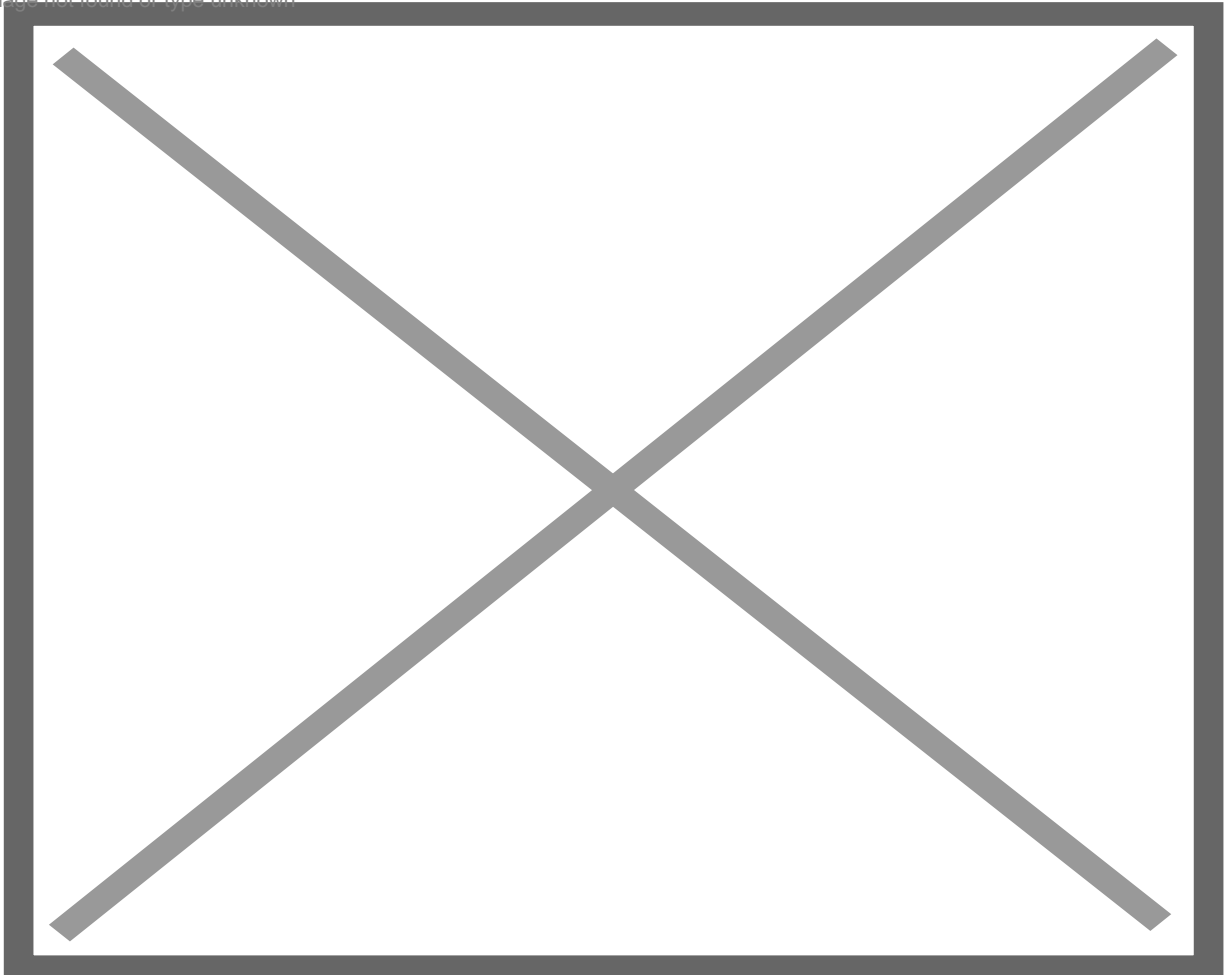
## St. Croix's Arianna Connor Among 250 U.S. Students Chosen for Elite Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange Scholarship

The Educational Complex junior advanced through essays, recommendations, and a semifinalist interview in Atlanta to earn a place in the CBYX program, which fosters cross-cultural skills, grassroots diplomacy, and leadership through 1yr of study in Germany

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Arianna Connor, a 16-year-old St. Croix Educational Complex student, was awarded the prestigious Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange scholarship to spend her junior year studying in Germany.

Arianna Connor, a 16-year-old junior at St. Croix Educational Complex High School, has been awarded one of the most competitive student exchange scholarships in the nation: the Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange (CBYX).

The fully funded program, sponsored jointly by the U.S. Congress and the German Bundestag, will allow Connor to spend her junior year in Germany, living with a host family and attending a German high school. She will be among roughly 250 American students selected nationwide, representing less than 1 percent of applicants.

The CBYX program is a competitive, fully funded scholarship that promotes diplomacy between the United States and Germany. It is one of the most competitive scholarships for high school students, with an acceptance rate often cited as under 1%. Each year, the program awards about 210–250 scholarships to American high school students. The initiative is designed to strengthen U.S.–German relations by creating cultural and academic exchange opportunities for young ambassadors, and it continues to be supported by members of the U.S. Congress, including Virgin Islands Delegate Stacey Plaskett, who has worked to ensure access to students in the territory.

Program goals emphasize more than cultural exposure; CBYX is built to promote grassroots diplomacy. Selection committees look for applicants who want to serve as “citizen ambassadors.” For high school students, the experience is full immersion: participants live with a German host family and attend a local German high school. Throughout the year, students have unique opportunities to meet with German and American government officials, including a visit to the German Bundestag (Parliament) in Berlin and events at the U.S. Embassy. The program also includes organized cultural excursions and seminars around Germany, such as a mid-year seminar and an end-of-year event in Berlin. CBYX is designed to build a broad network of future leaders by fostering soft skills like adaptability, cross-cultural communication, and problem-solving.

Earning a place in the program requires advancing through a rigorous selection process that typically unfolds in two parts. The initial application—usually due in November—asks for written essays that reveal an applicant’s character and worldview. Connor wrote a letter to a host family to showcase her personality, which helps the program match students with suitable placements. Her future host family had actually visited the Virgin Islands on a cruise and enjoyed it. She also secured two letters of recommendation that spoke to qualities CBYX values, such as maturity, responsibility, and the ability to handle challenges. Thanks to this work, she advanced past the first phase. As a semi-finalist, Connor was invited to an interview in Atlanta, scheduled for January 2025. The interview stage allows the committee to meet candidates in person, typically through a one-on-one or small panel and a group exercise with other semi-finalists to gauge interpersonal skills, collaboration, and teamwork. CBYX seeks participants who are adaptable, respectful, and able to work well with others.

Connor’s own record helped her stand out. A dedicated honor roll student, she has performed for 12 years with the Caribbean Dance Company. She is a certified scuba diver and served as an outreach administrator for the St. Croix Sea Turtle Project at Sandy Point National Wildlife Refuge, contributing to marine conservation and education efforts. Her commitment to academics, the arts, and environmental stewardship—combined with her public-service mindset—matched what CBYX looks for in youth ambassadors.

She will take part in the 2026–2027 academic year exchange, completing her 11th-grade coursework overseas. In preparation, she has already attended a German language camp. While in Germany, she will live with the Holzapfel family in the village of Helmenzen in the state of Rheinland-Pfalz (Rhine-Palatinate) and attend Westerwald-Gymnasium, a college-preparatory

high school. Her year will include civic and cultural activities typical of CBYX participants.

“I am honored and incredibly excited for this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity,” Connor said. “My journey will take me more than 4,500 miles from my home, and I look forward to immersing myself in a new culture, becoming fluent in German, and proudly representing the Virgin Islands as a youth ambassador for the United States.”

Her family expressed pride in her achievement. Connor’s parents, Akima Williams and Jamie Connor, along with her siblings J’Leah and Marcus, said the scholarship will help her grow both personally and as a global citizen. “We are so proud of Arianna for her hard work and dedication,” her mother said. “This is an incredible opportunity for her to grow as a person and as a global citizen, and we know she will be a wonderful representative for the Virgin Islands.”

Connor’s selection promises to expand her educational opportunities and provide a global perspective that may shape her academic and career paths for years to come.

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