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Opinion: Governor Bryan, as a Senior, I am Disheartened that the 2020 Graduating Class Were Blocked From Hosting Motorcades While You Allowed it for Protesters

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Enduring the 2020 pandemic and stay-at-home order presented a lot of challenges and emotions for senior graduates across the U.S. Virgin Islands and abroad. I felt relieved that the territory was seriously taking the extra necessary precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 that took the lives of many around the world. I am filled with all sorts of emotions with this pandemic and the killing of George Floyd. I too am taking a stand with the protestors.

Now, Governor, this is my protest. I am protesting for my Senior Graduating Class of 2020. Our last day on campus was a Friday in the month of March. The school closures happened without

students, parents, teachers, faculty, staff and administrators realizing it would be our last day attending school and seeing our campus.

Many parents and students have voiced their concerns regarding how or when the senior graduation ceremonies should be held. It's obvious neither the principal, superintendent, nor the administrators took heed as to the selections of the Senior Class of 2020. As a senior, Governor, I felt as though I had NO VOICE and have NO CHOICE, and as if we the CHILDREN OF TOMORROW do not MATTER!

Graduation is a time of accolades, celebrating the many achievements of twelve plus years of dedication and hard work. It's the closing of one chapter as the next one begins. We didn't get to say our proper goodbyes or to thank all the people who made an impact in our lives and made this possible. Parents are also missing out on the pomp and circumstance. As I pondered what class night, introductory night, baccalaureate ceremonies and prom would have been like, I realized all of that is lost with no memories to fill the void. The void is filled with all sorts of sentiment.

On May 25th, 2020, Senator Kenneth "Kenny" Gittens requested a permit to have a grand motorcade for the graduates to be held on June 7th. I was elated. I'm sure many of us were actually looking forward to this event because the virtual graduation ceremony held via Zoom Video Conferencing only accommodated 100 participants. As a result, many of us graduates were unable to attend our own graduation. We then learned in the days leading up to the motorcade that it was cancelled. Virgin Islands Police Department Commissioner Trevor A. Velinor declined the permit under the Health State of Emergency presently in effect stating he could not issue a permit that would result in mass gathering before and/or after the event. His denial of the request is consistent with the Department of Health guidelines.

However Governor, I have listened to your press release allowing bars, casinos, restaurants and other retailers to resume operation with patrons while having the option of wearing a mask. Mass protests are being held with masks. As of June 1, 2020, the territory is allowing visitors to enter onto our shores. Therefore, why not let us, the Senior Class of 2020, wear our masks with the same social distancing precautions as these retailers and guests and have our traditional graduation ceremonies that we all deserve?

Governor, you and everyone else in your cabinet had something of value that we will never have. You all had the experience of marching to the traditional Graduation Anthem played by your schools' band/orchestra, emotion-filled mothers, fathers, family and friends cheering you on, and the passionate graduation speeches encouraging you to strive for the best. Everyone around you, whether they know you or not, comes out of the woodwork to watch as they cheer on the Graduating Class.

Governor Albert Bryan Jr., this senior is now taking a stand! It is time to "CHANGE COURSE NOW!" I am asking you to reconsider and schedule a date and time for the commencement ceremonies for the well-deserved Graduating Class of 2020.

Submitted by: Jahmelia Jackson