

GOVERNMENT OF  
THE VIRGIN ISLANDS OF THE UNITED STATES

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# Elections System of the Virgin Islands

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## ESVI: “Naturalization – Home is Where My Vote Is”

### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

October 2, 2023

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Dear Editor:

We have all heard that “the Virgin Islands is a Melting Pot.” Indeed, we are a place where people from various backgrounds come together and blend their cultures, traditions, and ideas to create a rich and diverse society. While these residents are Virgin Islanders by choice and not by birth, they contribute to our community and may also choose to become naturalized citizens and active in the electoral process. In the United States, naturalization is the process by which U.S. citizenship is granted to a lawful permanent resident after meeting the requirements established by Congress in the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). In the territory, the percentages of naturalized citizens who are active voters are St. Thomas 23%, St. John 15 %, and St. Croix 18%.

United States naturalization is not only beneficial for immigrants who seek that status and the resultant legal protection it offers, but it also provides advantages for the broader society and economy. Here are several reasons why:

**Identity/Cultural Enrichment.** For many immigrants, becoming a US citizen is an important part of forming their identity. They proudly value the opportunity to contribute to the fabric of our nation’s society. With such integration they bring new perspectives, experiences, cultural diversity, and ideas to their local communities.

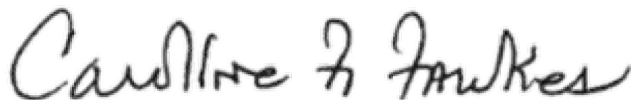
**Civic Engagement.** Naturalized citizens gain the right to vote, participate in lawmaking, run for public office, serve in the military and participate in the civic life of their community and nation.

**Economic Benefits.** Studies confirm that US naturalization improves the earning power of immigrants and raises productivity and wages for all Americans. Increased earnings foster better standards of living and new tax revenues for the government which can be used to fund infrastructure development, healthcare, education, and other public services. A diverse workforce that includes naturalized citizens can bring different perspectives and skills to the job market, fostering innovation and creativity within industries. Naturalized citizens often fill niches in the labor market, typically at the higher and lower ends of the skill spectrum, where the supply of native-born workers tends to fall short of demand by employers. Naturalization demonstrates to business owners and to leaders in the public sector that their employees are fully committed to life in the United States and its territories because it ensures stability for them and their families. This lessens the risks of a constantly revolving workforce.

**Integration into Society.** Social integration is a multi-faceted process that involves newly naturalized citizens with the receiving community. By building friendships to foster a sense of belonging, facilitating the exchange of cultural knowledge and experiences, and promoting unity by joining civic, religious and community organizations together, both groups can contribute more to their communities, by positively engaging in activities that align with their mutual interests and values.

Locally, thousands of naturalized citizens are making a tremendous and positive impact on our progress as businessowners, medical professionals, teachers, lawyers, engineers, tradespersons, government officials, artists, clergy and more. Well-known U.S. naturalized citizens over many decades have contributed to enriching the country's history, economies, innovation, science, culture, civics, and sports.

In recognition of its 60th Anniversary, the Elections System of the Virgin Islands hosted two public forums on October 4 and 6 entitled "Naturalization--Home is Where My Vote Is," which explored the profound role and impact of naturalized citizens living and voting in the US Virgin Islands. We are tremendously grateful for the participation of the moderators, panelists and audiences. Please take some time to view the sessions on [YouTube.com@ElectionSystem](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...). We welcome the public's feedback.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Caroline F. Fawkes". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Caroline F. Fawkes  
Supervisor

