



KIDS COUNT USVI

2022 Political Candidates Questionnaire

As a political candidate in the upcoming 2022 U.S. Virgin Islands Election, St. Croix Foundation's [KIDS COUNT USVI](#) Team invites you to participate in a 2022 Candidate Questionnaire relative to the well-being of children and families in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Please reflect on and answer each question by **September 26, 2022**. All responses will be housed on EngageVI.org and distributed to media and key stakeholders in our communities, including the KIDS COUNT USVI 'network' of nonprofits, public sector agencies, and national partners. This will give candidates the opportunity to share their platform and perspective with voters, and will give voters the opportunity to evaluate candidates on their engagement with these critical issues.

Please note that responses will be published as received and will not be edited in any way (e.g., for typos, misspellings, grammatical errors). Please direct any questions you may have to lcox@stxfoundation.org and a response will be forwarded promptly.

Submission Directions

1. Please complete the following questionnaire and submit your answers to Lilli Cox at lcox@stxfoundation.org by September 26, 2022, close of business.
2. If there are any technical difficulties with completing, saving, or submitting this form, please contact Lilli Cox at lcox@stxfoundation.org.

Candidate's Full Name

Samuel Carrión

Office sought in the 2022 USVI Election

Governor

Senator - STJ-STT

Senator - STX

Senator - VI

**1. For the last school year with publicly available data (SY2018-2019), the highest retention rate among students in public school occurred in the 9th grade, with almost one-third of students (30%) being retained. (See page 25 of the [2021 KIDS COUNT USVI Data Book](#).)*

While more recent data from the VIDE indicate that there has been some improvement in retention rates, given the data, what specific policies and/or interventions would you utilize to address this critical issue?

What funding opportunities/resources are you aware of that could be used for cross-departmental initiatives?

1. The Virgin Islands Department of Education has been working with the aid of the Legislature to secure dedicated funds for the purpose of improving students' academic performance. As a parent with children enrolled in our public school, I've had experience with and exposure to the different intervention programs offered by the Department of Education to help students who are struggling academically to succeed. One such initiative is the credit recovery program in high schools, which allows students who have previously failed a course to retake it and earn the credit. In addition to helping children with their homework, enrichment and after-school programs can also provide extra support in any areas of the curriculum where they may be having difficulty.

Moreover, it is crucial that school personnel interact and engage with students from the beginning to build relationships. Another major factor is parental involvement. As parents, we must maintain active and involvement in our children's school lives and inform the teacher if our child is struggling in any area.

Additionally, as a member of the Committee on Finance, we have funded a variety of non-profit organizations that provide afterschool programs in our community to ensure the availability of resources is accessible to our youth.

It is only through these combined efforts will we be able to recognize change.

**2. The KIDS COUNT team recognizes the inextricable link between our nonprofits/social impact organizations and children and families and is conducting interviews with local social service organizations, providing insight into the importance of and dire need for community resources in the USVI that provide sustainable safety nets, relief, and enrichment in our children's lives.*

What policies and/or amendments would you advocate for to support nonprofits that serve children and families in the areas of health, education, housing, public safety, and economic well-being?

2. A number of legislative hearings have been held with the Department of Human Services during my tenure as chairman of the Committee on Youth, Sports, Parks, and Recreation to evaluate the resources available to families in need and how we can improve on services provided.

In most situations, this is the first department with which families interact while seeking assistance. To effectively serve our community, it is essential that we understand how the department is operating and which areas require further attention.

Furthermore, as it relates to financial support of non-profit organizations that provides critical services, I cosponsored several legislations such as Bill 34-0176, which provided financing for Collective Collaboration to acquire a building to expand its services and continue providing free meals and shelter to those in need.

In addition, during the month of May, my team and I have been on the frontline volunteering alongside Community First, a non-profit organization that, in conjunction with the Department of Human Services, organized an outreach program for displaced individuals to receive access to much-needed services.

Lastly, my office has assisted various individuals/organizations who demonstrated a desire to assist the community in these specific critical areas to draft the necessary documents to be incorporated and get the nonprofit status which will enable them to receive local funds from the government

**3. On a national level, KIDS COUNT data are derived from many sources, including the American Community Survey (ACS), which contains housing, economics, demographics, and social data. Unfortunately, the ACS is not conducted in the USVI. In the absence of the ACS, the territory administers (via the Eastern Caribbean Center) the Virgin Islands Community Survey (VICS), collecting data similar to that included in the population and housing components of the decennial Census. The last published VICS was released in 2018 (reflecting 2015 data), with the release of 2018 data expected in 2022. (See page 6 of the [2021 KIDS COUNT USVI Data Book](#)).*

Given the territory's challenges around data collection and the rapidly changing ecosystem our children and families live in, what do you propose to improve data collection and usage for policy decisions in the USVI?

Acquiring accurate data for the territory drives policy which in return puts brings more funding into the territory and promotes transparency. With proper research, data collection will assist in developing solutions to major problems that we face in the Virgin Islands. Once we streamline these issues through collected data, lawmakers can then strategize to put legislation in place to create effective change.

Presently, the Government of the Virgin Islands utilizes the Bureau of Economic Research (BER) for certain data collection. I recognize that acquiring data can be a challenge for this entity at times since the employees are limited and data only exists in silos.

Expanding BER by giving it total control of all data collected in the territory will improve the way data collection is processed and shared. Government agencies could use software linked to this agency so that data is automatically sent to them and they can house data and analyze it as necessary.

Much of this data would be made publicly available in machine-readable formats like CSV or Excel files, allowing for easy analysis by those who may be interested.

**4. According to the most recent available data (2019-2020 school year), 54% of English Language Learner (ELL) public high school students did not graduate in 4 years compared to 71% of all public high school students (page 27, [2021 KIDS COUNT USVI Data Book](#)).*

How do you propose we support ELL students and address their academic, social, and emotional needs to improve their educational outcomes?

Being a former English Language Learner (ELL) student, I have first-hand experience with the challenges that ELL's face in the classroom. For this reason, shortly after being elected to the 34th Legislature, I introduced the Bilingual and English Language Deployment Act (now Act 8555). Which lays the groundwork for recruiting and training capable teachers and enhancing support for those learning English.

Although more than 10% of high school students in the Virgin Islands currently require bilingual instruction, it has been nearly 50 years since we established new legislation in this area. In the same way that we require updated and modernized school buildings, we also require to regularly evaluate and update our curriculum to better serve our children.

The measure also appointed a director of the program to monitor the overall success of the program to ensure that ELL students are receiving the same tools and resources as their English-speaking peers.

The effectiveness of the program also depends on the Department of Education's efforts to keep ESL-trained teachers in their current positions.

When ELL students are given the tools to succeed academically, their emotional and social skills also improves.

**5. In 2018, 36% of surveyed public high school students "felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for 2 or more weeks in a row that they stopped doing some usual activities" (page 38, [2021 KIDS COUNT USVI Data Book](#)) - a response often associated with clinical depression.*

What do you consider to be some of the primary contributing factors to the mental health challenges facing our youth, and what are some of the systemic 'fixes' to the Territory's mental health infrastructure?

Mental health has continued to be an ongoing crisis within the territory. Due to the pandemic, mental health issues are even more prevalent in our youth. Factors such as unprecedented school closures, loss of face-to-face support systems, enforced isolation, disrupted routines, family problems and more have created an environment of stress, anxiety, depression, and fear that has triggered or worsened adolescent mental health issues.

In order to comprehensively address the territory's mental health system, we must adopt a comprehensive Virgin Islands Behavioral Health Act that provides for a treatment facility within the Virgin Islands as well as greater access specifically to home and community-based behavioral services for both children and adults.

As a member of the Committee on Health, Hospital, and Human Services, I co-sponsored Bill 34-0279 along with my colleagues to introduce legislation that would address our longstanding behavioral health issues in the territory. Not having a treatment facility has proven to be a major issue for the territory. The measure would help many Virgin Islanders who suffer from mental health problems and lacks access to clinical care the ability to receive services in the territory.

Additionally, expanding access is key we must seek ways to ensure that home and community-based services are not restricted. We must move to developing and creating an infrastructure that allows access to everyone regardless of their status. If access is available more individuals will be able to obtain the needed services.

We must build a mental health system within this territory that provides services at all levels including services available within our schools.

**6. Opportunity Youth are generally defined as those young people between the ages of 16 to 24 years old who are considered "disconnected" from school and work (i.e., not in school and not participating in the labor market), according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Data on Opportunity Youth in the USVI are minimal and variable from year to year. Previous KIDS COUNT Data Books report that between 2005 and 2014 the percentage of teens ages 16 to 19 that were not in school and not working fluctuated from a low of 11.3% (in 2006) to a high of 27% (in 2013).*

What specific steps and strategies would you develop to reconnect this population?

As the chair of Youth, Sports, Parks and Recreation (YSPR) and the Legislative Youth Advisory Council (LYAC), I have worked closely with my colleagues in the 34th Legislature to revitalize the Legislative Youth Advisory Council.

The LYAC was established to provide a forum for young people of both districts (ages 14 to 21) to participate in the formulation and implementation of youth-related public policies. A large portion of today's youth feels as though they have no voice and want to be heard in the policymaking process.

My commitment to our youth is unwavering, and I have worked relentlessly with our youth. For this purpose, I have been diligently collaborating with LYAC to ensure that they receive the financial support, training, and guidance to bring forth the change they would like to see in the Virgin Islands.

I've also invited the Department of Labor (DOL) to testify before the Committee on Youth, Sports, Parks, and Recreation to gain an overview of the services provided to our youth. Several of the Department's youth-oriented services were highlighted during our most recent hearing. They expanded on the various strategies used to inform and enroll minors in youth programs. They also discussed a variety of techniques to not only inform adolescents about the various youth programs but also enroll them.

A discovery that was made during my meeting with DOL was that the department lacked exposure and recruitment to the Spanish-speaking population on St. Croix. Since then, my office has been communicating regularly with DOL to ensure that all releases are made in both English and Spanish.

Thank you for participating.