



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 Ophelia "Nemmy" Jackson

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?

Studies have proven that students who are experiencing behavioral challenges are more likely to perform poorly academically. Currently, the main resolution for these behavioral challenges is suspension, which is not effective. I would seek a funding source for the collection of data on key indicators of students who may be struggling (such as poor attendance or academic performance) and geared specifically to identify students who are at high risk for retention and drop out. I will advocate for implementing an in-school suspension program on elementary, Junior and high school levels. The goal of the in-school suspension program will provide students with tools to assist them academically, socially, emotionally, and with psychological issues. In addition, in-school suspension program; funding is needed to provide all students with conflict resolution and coping skills classes.

These initiatives will result in behavioral change. Further, federal funding sources that may allow cross departmental initiative are through the Community Block Grant, Child Care and Development Fund in addition to the 21st Century Community Learning Center, (21st CCLC).

**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?

When elected, I will advocate for increased access of funding for non-profit organizations throughout the territory. When these organizations are strapped for the necessary resources to provide needed services, the community is negatively impacted. I support public/private partnership, which is necessary to effectively serve our community. I will champion support for the resources our non-profit organizations need to address the challenges based on the data.

**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?

I will advocate for funding the Bureau of Economic Research and Statistics to properly staff and acquire the resources for the effective operation of the Bureau.

**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?

Local funds must be appropriated, where federal funds fall short, to address the programs and assistance this student population needs to perform sufficiently. In addition to the programs, adequate staffing must be a priority.

**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?

Research has indicated that some primary contributing factors for the rise in mental health challenge amongst our youth includes:

- Abuse, neglect, drug use,
- Increased stress, fear, and anxiety.
- Parental depression.
- Negative family environment (may include parental substance abuse)
- Child mistreatment or abuse by parents.
- Family conflict.
- Loss of school, sport, church, community routine.

It is imperative that youth and the community of the whole are enlightened about mental illnesses to dispel myths. This will allow individuals to be more open to seek early interventions. Currently, Government employees can utilize Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and others can use the Medical Assistance Program. (MAP), if eligible. Further accessibility to continuous outreach sessions and follow-up are also critical. Additionally, the community must feel that mental illness is important, so having available treatment center(s) and seeing less affected people on the streets will begin to rewrite the negative narrative

**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?

Every concern does not call for new ideas. The Department of Labor has workforce development programs, career enhancement opportunities and the Work, Learn and Earn Program that specifically targets this population. I will also promote and advocate for enhanced and effective strategies to meet this population for increased enrollment into these existing programs.

Thank you for participating.