

## Dear Editor, ‘Come Home’ Rings Hollow When the Struggles That Drove Us Away Still Exist

**Dwight M. Cartier rebukes former Senator Nellie O’Reilly’s call for Virgin Islanders to return, citing unaffordable living, unsafe conditions, and systemic failures that remain unaddressed since her time in office—conditions that drove many to leave.**

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Longstanding pothole located just before Pearl B. Larsen K-8 School, heading east. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM.

Dear Chief Editor,

I write in response to Former Senator Nereida “Nellie” Rivera-O’Reilly’s recent public statement urging Virgin Islanders abroad to “come back home.” As a resident of St. Croix, I found her remarks deeply disappointing and out of touch with the reality many of us continue to endure in

the Virgin Islands.

For someone who served five consecutive terms in the Legislature, her comments fail to account for the very issues that forced so many Virgin Islanders to leave in the first place—unaffordable living costs, crumbling infrastructure, healthcare facilities still awaiting reconstruction nearly eight years after the hurricanes, an education system plagued by shortages and decay, and a public safety crisis that leaves too many of us feeling unsafe in our own neighborhoods.

This is not simply a matter of one social media post. It is a question of accountability.

During her time in office, Senator Rivera-O'Reilly was part of a governing body that oversaw:

- Electricity rates among the highest in the United States;
- Hospitals still in limbo since Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017;
- A persistent shortage of teachers and special-education professionals across our schools;
- A violent crime rate that continues to rank among the highest in the Caribbean;
- And a government culture that too often prioritizes political favors and private contracts over public need.

For decades, Virgin Islanders have been asked to believe in change while still living with the same potholes, blackouts, and broken promises. Now, being asked to come back—without any meaningful sign that conditions have improved?

That's not leadership. That's deflection.

Senator Rivera-O'Reilly said, "We can do this." But what exactly has been done to earn back the trust of the people—both those who stayed and those who left?

The truth is, many Virgin Islanders who live abroad already contribute. They invest, they advocate, they support their families here, and they uplift this territory from wherever they are. They are not disconnected; they are doing their part. The question is whether our leaders—past and present—are willing to do theirs.

If Senator Rivera-O'Reilly truly wishes to see Virgin Islanders return, then let it begin with honesty: an acknowledgment of the failures that took place under her leadership and a commitment to championing systemic reform rooted in transparency, equity, and measurable outcomes.

Anything less is political nostalgia—and the people of this territory deserve better.

Sincerely,

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