

Lawmakers Approve Matarangas-King's Nomination as Tourism Commissioner After Vision-Focused Testimony

Jennifer Matarangas-King won approval after outlining a tourism vision rooted in community benefit, improved visitor experiences, stronger communication, timely vendor payments, and new marketing strategies, earning praise for her leadership approach.

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Nelcia Charlemagne **November 14, 2025**

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Jennifer Matarangas-King. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE.

The Committee on Rules and Judiciary has approved the Governor's nomination of Jennifer Matarangas-King as Commissioner of the Department of Tourism.

Ms. Matarangas-King appeared before the Committee on Thursday, where she told lawmakers about her academic achievements and professional experience. Along with roles in marketing, communications, government, and community relations, Matarangas-King spent nearly 30 years at Innovative, Viya, and now One Communication. These experiences provided her with the “expertise and transferable skills necessary to lead our tourism strategy with both creativity and discipline.”

As commissioner, Ms. Matarangas-King intends to “bring a global perspective and a deep local understanding.” She says that policies and campaigns must “ultimately benefit the people who call the Virgin Islands home.” The commissioner-nominee envisions a tourism industry that is “resilient, inclusive and future focused.” She has also promised to maintain “a balance between progress and preservation” as the Department works to grow the tourism industry.

As nominee, Ms. Matarangas-King has led the Department of Tourism for several weeks now. In that time, she told lawmakers she has attempted to strengthen the Department through “deliberate action, collaboration and accountability.” DOT has brought on new employees, including two new directors of visitor experience. That personnel update seemed to please committee members.

Outside of international campaigns to draw more visitors to the U.S. Virgin Islands, Matarangas-King wants residents to appreciate their role in the tourism industry. DOT’s “VI Means Vest Interest” campaign is centered on “building community accountability, excitement and action.”

Among her long and short-term goals are boosting the visitor experience, providing a “wow factor” for visitors, particularly cruise passengers aboard all-inclusive ships. Matarangas-King also wants to keep Virgin Islanders better informed of the department’s work. “Not everyone may understand, but I think it's good to communicate and so there's no misunderstanding,” she said.

Timely [vendor payments](#) from the Department are also among her top priorities. “We know that that can affect our reputation,” she noted.

Lawmakers responded well to Ms. Matarangas-King's presentation, offering advice on how to grow the economy through tourism. Senator Alma Francis Heyliger suggested exploring partnerships with the film and entertainment industry to “really help propel the Virgin Islands even further.” The commissioner-nominee affirmed that it is “top of mind” along with influencer partnerships.

Senator Francis-Heyliger appealed for promotion of the Virgin Islands in new source markets like Asia, while Senator Novelle Francis encouraged a marketing push within the Caribbean. Tourism officials are open to exploration, said Ms. Matarangas-King, but explained that “the challenge right now is concerns about visa and traveling here.”

There are undoubtedly high expectations for Matarangas-King as she takes the helm of the Department of Tourism. Senator Kenneth Gittens underscored the committee’s confidence in her leadership, telling her, “I am looking forward for good things coming out of the Department of Tourism through your leadership.”