GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

STATEMENT

Tel: (284)468-2730
Official Government Website:
https://gov.vg

Remarks by Honourable Sharie B. De Castro at H. Lavity Stoutt Community College Graduation 2026

Release Date: 15 June, 2026



Premier, Ministers, Members of the House of Assembly, Board of Governors, President, faculty and staff, proud parents, family, friends, supporters, and most importantly, the remarkable graduating Class of 2026, good afternoon.

Class of 2026, before we celebrate where you are today, I want to talk for a moment about how you got here. Because none of us arrives at a moment like this by accident. Every achievement has a story behind it. Every opportunity has a foundation beneath it and every one of us benefits from the vision of those who came before.

You see, I was born in 1990, the very year this institution opened its doors. Before I ever took my first breath, someone had already dreamed of me. Before I knew my name, someone had already invested in my future. Before I ever walked the halls of this institution, someone had already built a place where I could belong. And as I stand here today, I realise something profound. That story is not just my story. It is your story too.

That someone was the late great Hon. Hamilton Lavity Stoutt.

Decades ago, he imagined a future that many could not yet see. Many saw a community college. He saw possibility. Many saw a building. He saw generations and perhaps that is what vision ultimately requires.

Audacity.

The audacity to begin before all the answers are known. The audacity to build something whose full impact you may never live to witness. The audacity to reject limitations and pursue possibilities.

Thank God for the audacity of H. L. Stoutt.

Because had he not possessed the conviction to imagine more for these Virgin Islands, many of us in this room—including me—might never have had the opportunities that helped shape who we are today.

Class of 2026, the lesson in that story is not simply that vision matters. It is that vision requires audacity. The audacity to pursue an idea before anyone else

understands it. The gumption to keep building instead of becoming distracted by every battle. The conviction to create where others criticise. To innovate where others hesitate. To solve problems where others see obstacles. To refuse to accept that “the way it has always been” is the way it must always be.

Every meaningful achievement begins there. And as you leave here today, my hope is that you will carry that same spirit with you. The audacity to leave these Virgin Islands better than you found them, because every generation inherits a legacy.

But every generation also has a responsibility to leave one behind. And just imagine what would be possible if every graduate in this room accepted that responsibility. If every one of you chose to build something. To solve something. To improve something. To create something. To leave a mark that outlives you. Imagine the impact that would have on these Virgin Islands. Imagine the future that could be created. Not by one person. Not by one institution. But by an entire generation determined to make a difference.

And the beautiful thing is that journey begins today. But before you build what comes next, take a moment to celebrate what you have already achieved. Today we celebrate your determination. Your perseverance. Your sacrifice. Your success.

Please join me in celebrating the H. Lavity Stoutt Community College Class of 2026.

Today, I am especially proud to recognise several outstanding members of this graduating class whose achievements reflect the continued growth and strengthening of our education system. For the first time in nearly a decade, five Teacher Trainees are graduating from the HLSCC’s Associate Degree in Education following its successful revitalization.

We also celebrate nine educators who have completed the Certificate in Education and sixteen aspiring educational leaders who have successfully completed the Certificate in Educational Leadership.

These programmes, fully funded by the Government of the Virgin Islands, represent a significant investment in the future of our territory. They reflect our commitment not only to the success of our students, but to the professional growth

of the educators who inspire them and the leaders who will shape the future of education in the Virgin Islands.

I would also like to recognise two graduates who remind us what that audacity looks like in practice. Please help me celebrate our Highest Full-Time Graduate for 2026, Rhiann Ramlall and our Highest Part-Time Graduate for 2026, Erisha Bobb.

Rhiann and Erisha, please join me on stage to receive your awards.

In recognition of your outstanding accomplishments, each of you will receive a commemorative trophy and a monetary award of ten thousand dollars to support your continued educational pursuits.

Please join me once again in congratulating Rhiann and Erisha.

Class of 2026, hold on to this moment. Because while every graduation is special, very few become part of history.

And every now and then, history gives us a rare moment. A moment when we get to witness not only the fulfilment of a dream—but the graduation of the dream itself. Class of 2026—you are not the only graduates in this room.

Today, another graduate stands among you. Today, another institution is crossing the stage. Today, another dream is moving its tassel. Today, another vision is receiving its diploma. Today, H. Lavity Stoutt Community College graduates. For thirty-six years, this institution has prepared graduates for the future. Today, it graduates into its own.

And it is my profound honour, as Minister for Education, Youth Affairs and Sports, and as a proud alumna of this institution, to announce that H. Lavity Stoutt Community College has received approval to begin offering its FIRST EVER internationally accredited bachelor's degree programme RIGHT HERE in the Virgin Islands.

This is indeed an auspicious occasion. And it deserves a celebration. But that is not the only milestone we celebrate today.

Alongside approval for our first bachelor's degree programme from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, HLSCC has also received approval to expand its scope of accreditation to include distance education.

These achievements are especially significant because HLSCC remains the only internationally accredited national college in the OECS region.

Together, these approvals represent institutional transformation. They signal that HLSCC is no longer limited by geography. That opportunity is no longer confined by borders. Some students will come to the Virgin Islands to learn. Others will connect with the Virgin Islands from wherever they are in the world. Either way, the reach of this institution is expanding, and with it, the possibilities for our people and our economy. And because we believe in that future, we are already preparing for it.

Even before this approval was granted, we believed. That is why plans are already underway for student dormitories at HLSCC. Because when you truly believe something is possible, you do not wait until the door opens to start walking. You begin preparing long before the handle turns. We are preparing for a future where students do not simply leave the Virgin Islands to pursue higher education. They come to the Virgin Islands to pursue it. A future where HLSCC serves not only our own people, but students from across the region and around the world.

For thirty-six years, HLSCC has transformed lives. Today, it takes its next great step. And fittingly, we begin with education. Because as we reimagine education in the Virgin Islands, we recognise a simple truth: If we are serious about transforming education, then we must also transform how educators are prepared. If we are serious about changing outcomes for students, then we must be serious about changing how teachers are taught. Through our Institute of Education and this new bachelor's degree programme, we are not simply creating another degree. We are creating a solution.

A solution designed to prepare educators who can teach students to think critically, solve problems, innovate, collaborate and communicate. Educators who understand that education is not merely about transferring knowledge. It is about unlocking potential. It is about preparing young people not simply for the world as it is, but for the world they will create. And while we begin with education, we will

not end there. The work ahead now calls us to identify the next areas where HLSCC can lead, innovate and serve. Areas aligned with the future of our economy. Areas aligned with the needs of our people. Because our task is not simply to respond to the future. It is to help shape it.

And this is only the beginning. Today's achievement belongs to many people. To the Board of Governors. To President Georges and his Cabinet. To the Institute of Education. To the faculty and staff of HLSCC. To the dedicated team within the Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports. To the Government of the Virgin Islands. Thank you. This achievement belongs to all of us.

I often say:

"You can't get change if you give exact. But if you give more, you get change."

Over the last few years, the Government of the Virgin Islands has chosen to give more to HLSCC. More investment. More vision. More opportunity. And because we have chosen to give more, we are beginning to see change.

Graduates today, you graduate. Today, HLSCC graduates. Today, the Virgin Islands graduates into a new chapter of possibility. Let today be remembered as the day we decided that what has never been done before can, in fact, be done. Let us dream boldly. Let us build courageously. Let us educate relentlessly. Let us believe unapologetically. And let us never forget that the future of the Virgin Islands is not something we wait for. It is something we create.

Congratulations, Class of 2026. Congratulations, H. Lavity Stoutt Community College. And congratulations, Virgin Islands.

Our tomorrow begins today.

For Additional Information Contact:

Ms. Angelique Lettsome
Information Officer I
Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports

Telephone: 1-284-468-9448
Email: anlettsome@gov.vg

Additional Documents or Media

- hon_sharie_de_castro's_hlscc_2026_graduation_remarks.pdf