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"It doesn't matter how strong your opinions are. If you don't use your power for positive change, you are indeed part of the problem." -Coretta Scott King

Although many generations of Americans fought (and are still fighting) for equal access to voting rights, voting abstention is far too common in the United States, including in the U.S. Virgin Islands. I would like to believe that with the many challenges in our country like inequality, climate change, natural disasters and pandemics, Americans would be motivated to participate in elections because they care about how their elected officials see the world and because they care about who should be "in charge". I would like to see voting Americans set the example for my generation, who cannot yet vote. However, I do not always see Virgin Islanders "using their power for positive change" as Mrs. King encouraged. This generation of young Virgin Islanders has gone through the two hurricanes in 2017 and COVID-19 which has destroyed schools and many sports programs, leaving many teenagers with depression, anxiety, learning losses and more. This generation is growing up in unsafe environments and not getting the education and support they need which leaves them with a greater sense of hopelessness, and when they're older, they may not have any interest in voting. We are raising a generation of people who will most likely not want to participate in any form of civic engagement.

While there is no immediate solution to the problem of voter abstention, perhaps education can be part of the solution. I support implementing, as part of our history classes, more training about the importance of civic engagement and voting. This training could even teach about how to vote with demonstrations on how to fill out a ballot and how to use a voting machine and about the history of suffrage in the U.S. and the Virgin Islands. I believe that if you teach younger people about the struggle and the work it took to get to the place we are now, they will be more encouraged to vote. I recently went on a field trip with my class to the Murphy House and Annaberg ruins on St. John where we learned about the 1733 slave insurrection and revolt. This information opened up my eyes to how far we have come as a community and the power of a small group to make major changes. Although we still have much to do, little changes, like having a program like this could encourage my generation to vote once we turn 18, and help us understand that a community is not just one person, and if we want to make a change for future generations, we can start by voting and engaging in politics.

In addition, I support taking advantage of new technologies constantly being made. Teenagers especially are continually being influenced by social media and the internet. I support

creating a campaign on social media geared toward both teenagers and adults, encouraging them to vote and to encourage other people to vote as well. This could inspire adults to talk to teenagers about voting and the importance of it. Creating enjoyable, interactive ways on social media to teach about voting could be very influential, and might inspire more people to vote. With a new generation of technology, we could reach farther than the Virgin Islands as well, reaching the mainland and influencing people there to vote. As Coretta Scott King said, “use your power for positive change”, and I believe that we should take advantage of all our resources for the better of the community.