

**Committee on Education and Workforce Development**  
**Remarks by Catherine Hendry, Esq., Commissioner**  
**V.I. Department of Labor**  
**June 1, 2016**

Good Afternoon...Honorable Senator Jean Forde, Chairman, Honorable Members of the Committee on Education and Workforce Development, Distinguished Senators, ladies and gentlemen, and to the listening and viewing audience, I am Catherine Hendry, Esq., Commissioner of the Virgin Islands Department of Labor.

I am pleased to be here today with Assistant Commissioner Kendra Roach and VIDOL's Senior Management Team to provide an update on the activities and programs of the Department of Labor:

The Workforce Development Unit continues to administer federal & local funded grant programs and services to Youth, Unemployed, Underemployed Adults, and Dislocated Workers in each District. Additionally, Employers/Businesses and Incumbent Worker Services are among the menu of services offered through the Virgin Islands Workforce System and our Virgin Islands America Job Centers (AJCS) at the Department of Labor in St. Croix and St. Thomas.

As a reminder, American Job Centers were established by the U.S. Department of Labor and offer free services and staff to help the underemployed look for work, find training, and answer employment-related questions. Our AJCS offer specific workshops and special employment programs for Veterans, Youth ages 14 to 24, and persons who have a disability. We remind the Community to visit our website [www.vidol.gov](http://www.vidol.gov) or contact the V.I. Department of Labor to learn more about our American Job Center Opportunities.

Our primary activities reflecting the mandates for utilization of these federal 7 local funded grants include the following:

- Job Search Registration
- Testing & Assessments
- Resume Building
- Interviewing Skills
- Access to Labor Market Information
- Basic Computer & Financial Literacy Workshops
- Job Search

- Job Matching
- Recruitment
- Pre-screening
- Job Fairs

As of first quarter January-March, 2016, The Workforce System received a total of five hundred & twenty-eight (528) Job Orders, or posts of available employment, reflecting a total of one thousand forty-eight (1,048), job openings. Our Workforce data system reveals that four-thousand, six-hundred and seventeen (4,617) referrals were made in response to these openings; and, of this total sixty-two (62) hires were resulted. Additionally, a total of fifty-five (55) new employer/business registered with the Workforce System during this quarter: Twenty-one (21) on St. Croix and Thirty (30) on St. Thomas and Four (4) with stateside addresses. Currently, there are one hundred and one (101) individuals enrolled in Skill training programs funded through the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA).

#### NEW INITIATIVES & ACTIVITIES DURING THIS QUARTER

- 1) GED FAST FORWARD PROGRAM
- 2) PRE-APPRENTICESHIP partnership with VIHFA
- 3) Technical Assistance Sessions with USDOL-ETA team regarding WIOA implementation and related Business Engagement – Sector Strategies Project

#### UPCOMING INITIATIVES are:

- 1) Work Experience Partnership with Gold Coast Yachts
- 2) On-the-Job Training Program for Law Enforcement & Security Sector
- 3) Finalization & Implementation of:
  - a) ‘Career Pathways’ Initiative
  - b) Virgin Islands Workforce System Webpage
  - c) Workforce System Marketing & Promotional Campaign
  - d) College for America ‘Pilot’ Project
  - e) Disability Employment project with VIUCEDD- the Virgin Islands University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities.

The following data describes the status of our youth programs, activities, and partnerships from 1/1/2016 – 4/30/2016. Our Youth team successfully implemented the “Work, Learn, and Earn” (WLE) Program which is a twelve-week work experience program designed to assist high school graduates and out-of-school youth with resume development, and soft skills training based on each participant’s long term career goals. Participants are placed with Employers that match their career interests. From 1/1/2016 to 4/30/2016 six (6) out of school youth in St. Croix and

seventeen (17) in St. Thomas have registered and participated in this program. Five (5) of those who successfully completed their twelve weeks have gained full-time employment.

The Summer Youth Work Experience Program (SYWEP), which is a component of the year-round program, is designed to provide practical hands-on experience to youth between the ages of 14-25 in their chosen career goal. This is accomplished by providing training and employment for youth deemed eligible for participating in accordance with federal and local rules and regulations. This year we anticipate servicing 250 in-school youth, 80 out of school youth, 180 college youth, 30 Labor Investing For Tomorrow (LIFT) youth for a total of 540 youth in the territory to receive summer work experience.

\*\*\* Referrals come from the following agencies

- Alternative Education
- Juvenile Justice
- Vocational Rehabilitation

SYWEP Applicants are to date:

- St. Thomas – 420
- St. Croix – 632
- \*\*\*This number includes Career Exploration for Youth.
  - VIDOL will fund 13 special projects over the summer months in the amount of \$4,800 per project which will serve 14 and 15 year old youth throughout the territory.

Through the School-to-Work Program, the Virgin Islands Department of Labor will assist the St. Croix Educational Complex to address their challenges and implement a service strategy that provides the following services to youth.

- An Orientation of VIDOL Services
- Pre-Employment Services to include resume development and interview skills
- Soft Skills Training
- Labor market Information

The Jobs for America's Graduates Virgin Islands (JAGVI) continues to be a viable program for targeting students at risk of dropping out of school. JAG-VI mirrors the national Mission which is to help resolve the country's dropout and transition problems by expanding state/territory organizations and local programs that help young people greatest at risk overcome barriers to graduation from high school and become college and career ready. During the 2015 -2016 academic

school year, JAG-VI was operating with 40 Students on St. Thomas. Currently, VIDOL is seeking to attain additional funding to support the JAGVI initiative on St. Croix at both high schools. Through the partnership with DOE, two (2) new JAG specialist will be hired for the 2016-2017 academic school year. Since its inception in 2010, JAGVI has graduated over 100 youth throughout the territory. Students in this program have been exposed to careers, community service, leadership development, and most importantly a greater sense of worth in the community.

## 1. Description of Programs, Services and Activities

### Education

#### Women's Coalition Project Link

- The Women's Coalition Project Link is a High School Diploma program which includes Job Preparation training for youth. The Year round program provides a classroom environment with personal tutors and follows the curriculum of The American Schools.
  - o Five (5) out of school youth participated in the program.
  - o They are expected to complete in November 2016.

#### KET GED Fast Forward – enrolled in February 2016

- The KET GED Fast Forward Program provides online GED prep courses that teach math, language arts, science, and social studies with tools that will help Virgin Islands youth identify their strengths and weaknesses. Our Program began in February, and currently enrolled are:
  - o Four (4) youth on St. Thomas
  - o Two (2) youth on St. Croix

#### GED

- Our GED program assisted one (1) youth with completing Pre-GED exam and we expect that student to complete their GED with next 2 weeks

## 2. Special initiatives and/or partnerships in effect

### YouthBuild

- The Virgin Islands Housing Authority's YouthBuild U.S. Virgin Islands (YBUSVI) Program is a 48 week federally funded multi-strategy, youth leadership and community development program that offers opportunities for, out of school or unskilled young people ages 16-24.

Currently enrolled are:

- o 17 youth on St. Croix

- o 13 Youth on St. Thomas

**VI Housing Finance Authority (Pre-Apprenticeship)**

- This program is a partnership with VIHFA where out of school youth receive classroom training leading to nationally recognized certification (National Center for Construction, Education and Research – NCCER) in the construction field. Companies receiving contracts from VIHFA will take employee apprentices for the length of the contract.
  - o VIDOL referred 5 participants on St. Croix
  - o St. Thomas clients have been identified and are awaiting participation

**Outreach:**

**Senator Forde Outreach Initiative**

- Along with Senator Forde’s staff
  - o We entered at risk communities and informed clients of the services VIDOL provides; and
- conducted two (2) outreach activities
  - o December 18, 2016 and January 29, 2016
  - o Sites visited included: housing in eastern and central part of St. Thomas
  - o Provided information of VIDOL services to 27 individuals in the community (both adult and youth)
- On April 16, 2016, the VIDOL participated in an outreach for the homeless medical clinic at the Frederiksted Health Center location on Strand Street, F’sted, St. Croix.

**3. Total number of VIDOL Youth Participants (in and out of school) are:**

- In School Youth – 90
  - o STX – 50
  - o STT – 40
- Out of school Youth – 82
  - o STX – 45
  - o STT – 37

**-\*\*\* served by both Local and Federal Funds\*\*\***

**4. New Strategies, Programs, Activities & Services planned for April 1 thru (September 30, 2016) are:**

**UVI Summer Bridge**

- The SBP is residential that students stay at UVI and designed to enhance the readiness of graduating high school students for a college atmosphere. These

students will gain an advantage over the typical freshmen enrollees by jump-starting their college careers. The Program is also specifically designed to assist students in excelling on UVI's entrance exam.

- o 10 high school graduates

The Status of the VIDOL's efforts for the apprenticeship programs in the Territory are as follows:

The Virgin Islands Department of Labor has transmitted a comprehensive application to the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) to be recognized as a State Registration Agency for Federal purposes for Apprenticeship. To date, the application remains pending as the USDOL has notified the VIDOL that further revision must be made to the Virgin Islands law in order to conform to the national standards. While VIDOL made the requested revisions to the V.I. law and submitted a draft to the Governor's office for review and transmittal to the Legislature, we recently received notice that additional changes would have to be made in order to be in conformity with the National law. Those changes have been submitted to USDOL and we are awaiting final approval of those revisions. Once approved we anticipate resubmitting the draft changes to the Governor for review and transmittal.

The Status of the Division of Labor Relations: The Division of Labor Relations (LR) provides protection of workers' rights, regulates the employment practices of employers, promotes job opportunities for residents of the territory and encourages a healthier, more harmonious relationship between labor unions, the private business sector and the government. Labor Relations conducted outreaches as follows: Pearl B. Larsen- Presentation to Children addressing discrimination and unfair labor practices, Limetree Bay Terminals, LLC.- Presentation on compliance with the Labor laws of the Virgin Islands and availability of VIDOL Business Services/Resources, and upcoming participation in Orientation activities for Summer Youth employment with the Legislature of the Virgin Islands. LR Field visits as follows: addressed employment inquiries/activities of construction project at Estate Diamond in St. Croix.

Between LR in St. Croix and St. Thomas in April 2016: 3 EEOC Charges were filed; 9 Wrongful Discharges were filed; 4 Wage Claims Filed, with \$2,511.00 being collected. There were 303 telephone & Office visits; 13 Child Labor Certificates were issued. In May 2016: 1 EEOC Charge was filed; 4 Wrongful Discharges were filed; 4 Wage Claims were filed, with no wages recovered so far. There were 268 telephone & Office Visits; 49 Child Labor Certificates were issued.

The management and employees of the Department of Labor have and continue to carry out the local and federal mandates to the best of our ability in serving the people of our community by administering a system of effective programs and services designed to develop, protect and maintain a viable workforce despite the many challenges we are face with on a daily basis.

In conclusion, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to offer status update of the Virgin Islands Department of Labor. My colleagues and I will now answer any questions you may have regarding my testimony.

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