



FINANCE COMMITTEE CONTINUES THE FY 2017 BUDGET PROCESS

ST. THOMAS- The Committee on Finance, chaired by Sen. Clifford E. Graham, met on Monday to receive the Department of Education's 2017 fiscal year budget presentation at the Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall.

Dr. Sharon McCollum, Commissioner of the Department of Education, and her Leadership Team provided testimony in support of the fiscal year 2017 Budget.

Despite the severe budget cuts over the last ten fiscal years, they were able to make strides in their challenging current budget by developing a Strategic Performance Management Design and continued implementation of the Common Core State Standards Initiative.

The Department of Education has remodeled their mission statement and their vision to reflect their direction over the next five years. They are expected to finalize their new Performance Management Design draft strategy by July 31, 2016. The draft will demonstrate their commitment to all students and the need for improvement in academic achievement, teacher/leader effectiveness and organizational culture.

Currently, the Department of Education's Fiscal year 2017 budget is recommended at \$167,050,080. This amount represents a reduction of \$1,490,577 less than the department's revised current fiscal year 2016 budget. The reduction in the budget will primarily impact repairs and maintenance.

The recommended fiscal year 2017 personnel services appropriation of \$94,257,623 as presented, will allow the Department of Education to maintain its current staffing level of 2,153 employees. The 2017 personnel appropriation only funds 102 vacant positions at \$1,757,297, which only represents 50% of the total cost. The remaining personnel appropriation of \$4,358,237 is provided to fund the cost of the department's salary increases that were implemented in fiscal year 2016. The supplemental request for personnel services is \$2,157,297.

The recommended Fringe Benefits appropriation of \$44,934,463 funds the associated benefits including retirement, Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA), Medicare, health insurance premiums and Worker's Compensation. The supplemental request for fringe benefits is \$819,772.86 The recommended Material and Supplies appropriation of \$3,663,910 will provide funding for the School Food Authority and department-wide office, operating, repairs and maintenance supplies. The supplemental request for supplies is \$3,900,000.

The recommended other services and charges appropriation of \$14,194,834 will fund mandatory services such as pupil transportation, building rentals, janitorial services, etc. The supplemental request for other services and charges is \$12,839,500. The recommended utilities appropriation

of \$10,000,000 covers the department-wide cost of electricity and water. This amount represents a reduction of \$1,074,556 of the fiscal year 2016 budget of \$11,074,556.

Among the numerous challenges the department faces, the Commissioner and her Leadership Team expressed her efforts to locate \$2.6 million to purchase new Science textbooks and \$600,000 for Virgin Islands History textbooks.

Due to the restrictive level of funds recommended, the department requests a lump sum appropriation to make real time decisions in order to promptly address any needs that may occur in the upcoming fiscal year. “We are fully committed to our vision, mission, and three state priorities. We will continue to work to ensure that our students are college and career ready, while improving the organizational climate for students and staff,” concluded Dr. McCollum.

The Board of Education Chairperson, Mary L. Moorehead, gave a detailed account of the budget for the Board of Education. After her testimony, Chairman Graham announced that she had to leave shortly due to traveling accommodations. Her pending departure combined with the absence of the other elected officials of the board, prompted a motion by Sen. Vialet to dismiss their presentation and seconded by Sen. Blyden. The Committee Markup will handle the Board of Education’s budget.

Ronnie Jones, the Treasurer of the Virgin Island Career and Technical Education Board, testified before the Committee to defend their fiscal year 2017 budget proposal.

Mr. Jones outlined the accomplishments of the CTE and reminded the Committee that due to the rapid changes in our global economy, we must continue to train and prepare our workers to compete in challenging work environments.

The VICTEB requested \$600,000 for the 2017 fiscal year, an amount that falls short of the critical needs of the program. \$200,000 will be designated to teacher development, pedagogical training enhancements and OSHA safety training. \$100,000 will be used to fund improvements to the automotive classrooms and labs.