



VIRGIN ISLANDS BOARD OF CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Request,

Abstract

This testimony presents the FY2026 funding request of the Virgin Islands Board for Career and Technical Education (VIBCTE), emphasizing the need to restore the Board's semi-autonomous financial status and highlighting urgent budget constraints due to recent reallocations. It outlines recent achievements, including expanded CTE certifications, program revitalizations, and the reestablishment of NTHS. The Board renews its call for a \$600,000 appropriation to launch the Lena Schulterbrandt CTE Fund, supporting instructional capacity, technology, internships, and apprenticeships. Citing national data and bipartisan support for CTE, the testimony urges legislative action to secure the territory's future workforce.



GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS
Virgin Islands Board of Career and Technical Education



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Testimony Before the Committee on Finance 36th Legislature of the U.S.
Virgin Islands

Submitted by Anton W. Döös III, Executive Director, Virgin Islands
Board of Career and Technical Education (VIBCTE) Fiscal Year 2026
Budget Request,

Presented by Ms. JoAnn Murphy, Chair, Virgin Islands Board of Career
and Technical Education.

Good morning, Honorable Chairperson Novell E. Francis Jr, Honorable
Vice Chair Marvin A. Blyden, members of the Committee on Finance, and
members of the 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands. Thank you for the
opportunity to present this testimony on behalf of the Virgin Islands Board
for Career and Technical Education (VIBCTE), hereinafter referred to as
the Board.

It is essential to recognize that semi-autonomous agencies require a degree
of flexibility in managing their finances to fulfill their unique
responsibilities effectively.

This year, the Board is facing heightened challenging financial situations.
Our total budget request for FY2026 is \$689,681, which includes
\$289,667 for personnel services and \$140,371 in fringe benefits,
collectively representing the core funding necessary to maintain staff and
operations across both districts. The VIBCTE presently employs one
executive Director and three administrative staff members.



CTE Learning that works for the Virgin Islands

However, we must address a sudden and problematic shift. Historically, the **\$55,000 in Ragster and Petersen scholarships** was administered by the Department of Education. These scholarships are now administered through the Board and have been incorporated into our regular budget. Whereas appropriations for the administration of these scholarships should have been added to the regular VIBCTE budget, the scholarships are now being deducted from the regular VIBCTE general budget. The reduction in our available operating funds by over 8% to **\$204,643** is deeply concerning. Our agency maintains two government vehicles and currently has approximately **\$45,566.83** in outstanding vendor obligations, primarily due to delays and restrictions resulting from the centralized ERP system.

Fixed costs, which are outside of the Board’s control, such as office leases (\$51,000) and insurance premiums (\$15,000), continue to rise. The Board’s current budget appropriation provides neither the flexibility nor the responsiveness required to fulfill our statutory obligations, such as, but not limited to:

- Providing support and oversight to Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs within this territory
- Providing for the making of studies and investigations relating to career and technical education in such subjects,
- Promoting, maintaining, and aiding in the establishment of schools, departments, or classes for training in such subjects,
- Prescribing the qualifications for teachers and supervisors of such subjects

Examples of the Board’s support for CTE programs in the territory are as follows, but not limited to:

- Sponsoring students in Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs) to travel and represent the territory in National competitions,
- Assisting in the provision of CTE professional development and training to build upon and improve CTE programs within the territory,
- Representing the USVI at CTE National conferences to obtain information that is used to enhance our territory’s offerings further

VICTEB’s budget submission for 2025/26, therefore, reflects the OMB's suggestion of \$689,681. We must, thus, insist that semi-autonomous status be restored, accompanied by a system of **quarterly cash allotments** and **annual financial audits**, which would ensure both operational agility and fiscal accountability.

Programmatic Achievements and Strategic Gains

Despite these fiscal limitations, the VIBCTE has continued to push forward with impactful initiatives:

- **The National Technical Honor Society (NTHS)** was successfully reinstated at the Career and Technical Education Center and St. Croix Central High School. This year marks the first time an adult Career and Technical Education (CTE) chapter of the NTHS was formed, reflecting our commitment to lifelong learning.
- In partnership with the Department of Education's State Office, we initiated **program revitalization efforts** in critical sectors, including **Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN), Agriculture, Culinary Arts, Construction Technology, and Cybersecurity**. These reviews are the first step toward modernizing our offerings to meet the needs of the 21st-century workforce.
- We expanded the integration of **virtual reality and digital career exploration tools**, bringing 30 new modules into classrooms and reinforcing 21st-century learning environments.
- Our **CTE Instructor Certification Program**, supported by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Board of Education and UVI CELL, has increased the instructor certification rate from 15% to over 70% in five years.
- In collaboration with the VI Department of Education, the Board participated in the first Career and Technical Education Symposium, held on February 27, 2025, at the Marriott, Frenchman's Reef, to highlight the outcomes of students in Career and Technical Education across the territory and provide CTE students from across the territory with a platform to share their experiences in CTE and voice their ideas for change and growth in programs.
- We implemented a **CTE Certification Portal**, which expedites the certification application, document review, and approval processes.
- Together with the VIDE, the CTE Board hosted the Third Annual Territorial CTE Fair, held in the Emancipation Garden in St. Thomas, VI, with representation from the island of St. John. Exploratory students from the public, private, and parochial elementary and middle schools, including students from public and private schools on St. John, explored the Secondary (high school) and Adult CTE program offerings and learned from their Secondary peers in the St. Thomas/St. John and the St. Croix Districts regarding CTE programs at the High School level. Exploratory students engaged in hands-on activities in the trades, asked questions, and shared their learning experiences with mentors. Secondary students demonstrated their skill sets from various programs, including millwright, welding, HVAC, culinary arts, electrical work, carpentry, phlebotomy, EMT, nursing, plumbing, cosmetology, medical massage therapy, esthetics, and others.

Currently, there are **89** active CTE instructors in the territory, of whom **40** are certified, **24** are pending recertification, and **25** are employed but not certified. Additionally, **10** instructors are pursuing their credentials through study credits, online credentialing platforms, and professional licensing exams, with the goal of securing employment.

Systemic Challenges

A staggering majority of our Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs have gradually disappeared since 2000. Territorially, within some Middle and High schools, there is a notable decline in CTE instructors willing to continue programs, and many of our current CTE instructors are nearing retirement age. For example, in the St. Thomas/St. John district, we see a rapid decline in CTE instructors, resulting in dormant or sunset programs, such as culinary, CNA, electrical, and cosmetology. In the St. Croix district, we have lost programs such as Boat Building, Architectural Drafting, Diesel Mechanics, and graphic design. A combination of factors, including instructor shortages, aging facilities, and a lack of investment, significantly contributes to this issue.

In many cases, programs are now just **one instructor away from permanent closure**. With the uncertainty surrounding the reopening of the refinery in the St. Croix District and the continued emphasis on skilled labor, limited investments into CTE, lack of understanding of the importance that CTE play in the successful graduation rate of seniors, economic development and stability of the territory across all careers, and the overall reduction of our local trade and Industry workforce, this poses a critical threat to economic future of the USVI.

According to the **Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE)**:

- **Students who complete 2–3 CTE credits are 95% more likely to graduate** on time and 90% more likely to enroll in higher education. This is because incorporating CTE makes learning more relevant and engaging.
- **79% of U.S. schools currently offer CTE programs**, down slightly from 86% in 2023–24.
- **In 2024, over 152 state-level policies were passed across 40+ states in support of CTE expansion, work-based learning, and public-private partnerships, with a significant influx of state funding.**
- There is **bipartisan consensus in Congress to protect or potentially increase Perkins funding for Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs**, even amid broader budget pressures.

These outcomes make it clear: ***robust CTE programming is a pillar of student success.***

The Legal Framework: Authority Without Tools

As outlined in **Title 17, Chapter 23 of the Virgin Islands Code**, the VIBCTE is the sole territorial entity authorized to administer, supervise, and develop career and technical education programs, including curriculum approval, credentialing, and instructor certification.

Yet we face persistent structural limitations:

- To fulfill our statutory mandate, we must also **be granted precise enforcement mechanisms** to carry out the responsibilities assigned to us by law.
- The Board does **not have direct access to or oversight of federal CTE funding, and local financing appears to be non-existent**. However, recent collaboration with the VI Department of Education's State Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, specifically via Dr. Faulkner, has contributed to receiving some form of informational responses.
- The ERP system hinders timely responses to emergencies, even when funds are available.

This undermines not only our authority but also the efficiency and responsiveness needed to deliver quality education.

The Path Forward: The Ms. Lena Schulerbrandt CTE Fund

In response to the limitations of our current financial setup, we respectfully request legislative support for an appropriation of up to \$600,000 to establish the **Ms. Lena Schulerbrandt CTE Fund**.

This Fund would:

1. **Support hiring of part-time instructors, including journeymen or specialists, to bridge** the skills gap in high-demand fields. Currently, we need to review our onboarding process for tradespeople. This is a working objective of the Board.
2. **Support collaborative work with the VIDE and the VI Board of Education** to integrate and align our academic and CTE curricula, thereby reducing redundancy in core academic credits.
3. **Supporting the development of programs** in our secondary schools that align with the updated industry demands of the US Virgin Islands. Our seniors can graduate with low-level certifications. Some of the current areas of focus include IT and cybersecurity, healthcare, carpentry, and maritime, among others.

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4. **Provide support to the VIDE CTE programs** to aid in the maintenance of CTE classrooms, including assistance with obtaining necessary equipment and supplies that may be difficult for programs to acquire.
 5. Assist with more CTE Teacher certification offerings at the national level, including CTE teacher appreciation scholarships and increased exposure for CTE teachers.
 6. **Implement shared instructional technology** and pool financial resources with partners to contribute to the enhancement of a USVI shared Longitudinal Data System. This system will capture student data on Career and Technical Education enrollment and outcomes, aligning existing systems of the VIDE, VIDOL, DHS, and VIHA. The goal is to create a shared system that captures data on all students and residents. Specifically, since the reporting requirements of programs overlap, and valid data is currently complex for some agencies to capture.
 7. **Provide paid internships** for students in collaboration with local businesses and create a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with VIDOL to ensure that CTE students in each district are guaranteed participation in their paid internship and apprenticeship programs.
 8. **Cover emergency equipment needs**, certification testing, and instructional support.
 9. **Support CTSO participation** with a proposed 80/20 cost-sharing model, where families and the Fund share the costs to ensure accessibility.
 10. **Forming an exploratory WorldSkills chapter** is a significant and imperative step for the U.S. Virgin Islands. Our territory boasts a rich cultural tapestry and storied history, making our participation in WorldSkills particularly meaningful. By exposing our students to diverse skill sets and perspectives, we pave the way for transformative learning experiences that transcend borders. In this regard, we urge the legislative body, especially the Committee on Education and Workforce Development and the Committee on Economic Development, to schedule a visit to the WorldSkills Shanghai 2026. The 48th WorldSkills Competition will take place from *September 22 to 27, 2026*.

Additionally, we propose establishing school-based apprenticeship programs as a strategic goal for fiscal year 2026. These programs would:

- Offer structured, hands-on learning experiences in collaboration with local industries.
- Bridge the gap between classroom theory and on-the-job application.
- Prepare students for employment in critical sectors, including energy, healthcare, agriculture, and information technology.

Successful models from states like Maryland, which aim to target 45% of high school graduates to complete a pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship, or earn an industry-recognized credential by 2030, demonstrate the viability and long-term return on investment of this approach.

This marks the **fourth consecutive year** we have made this request. Inaction further erodes our ability to stabilize and grow CTE programs.

Collaboration, Innovation, and Next Steps

We are committed to working across government and community lines to restore Career and Technical Education (CTE) to its rightful prominence. Our interagency collaborations include:

- Ongoing alignment efforts with **UVI CELL, Department of Labor, VIBE, and VIDE**
 - Continue to support the design of **Agriculture pathways** from elementary through UVI degree programs.
 - Launching monthly **town hall sessions and social media outreach** to better inform parents, students, and employers of career readiness opportunities.
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Final Remarks

In closing, I urge this legislative body to consider the long-term impact of underinvesting in Career and Technical Education. VIBCTE is mandated by law to establish, maintain, and supervise Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs and credentials within the territory. But without the ability to execute, monitor, and fund programs effectively, our statutory authority is little more than words on paper.

Reinstating our **semi-autonomous financial status**, protecting our budget from unpredictable reallocations that have the potential to further cripple, stagnate, or hinder the strides we have made in CTE over future administrations, and investing in the **Schulterbrandt Fund** are not just fiscal decisions; they are also **educational, economic, and moral imperatives**.

On behalf of our Board, staff, and the hundreds of students we are now and, in the future,

I appreciate your continued attention and support.

I remain available to answer any questions you may have.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "JoAnn Murphy", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ms. JoAnn Murphy

Chair, Virgin Islands Board for Career and Technical Education