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VI BOARD OF EDUCATION'S TESTIMONY ON BILL NO. 34-0079

Good afternoon Honorable Genevieve Whitaker, Chairwoman of the Committee on Education and Workforce Development, committee members, other members of the 34th Legislature present, and the listening and viewing audiences. I am Kyza A. Callwood, chairman of the 20th VI Board of Education (hereinafter VIBE or the Board). With me today is Vice-Chair Winona A. Hendricks and our Executive Director, Dr. Stephanie Berry.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide general comments on the proposed Bill No. 34-0079 - an Act amending the Virgin Islands Code, Title 3, chapter 7, by designating the existing provisions as subchapter I and adding a subchapter II establishing the Bureau of School Construction and Maintenance (hereinafter Bureau) within the Virgin Islands Department of Education (hereinafter the Department); and amending title 33, chapter 111, section 3092a, changing the Education Maintenance Fund to the School Construction and Maintenance Fund, and making an appropriation of \$2,500,000 from the Virgin Islands Education Initiative Fund to the School Construction and Maintenance Fund and for other related purposes.

The Board believes this legislation has merit and supports a targeted focus on school maintenance. As it pertains to establishing the Bureau of School Construction and Maintenance within the Department, the Board provides the following comments:

- Specific language should be included regarding the jurisdictional authority of the VIBE, the Department, and the Bureau. For example, the VIBE maintains its authority to confirm school site readiness. Similarly, the Board conducts walkthroughs and develops the School Management and Accountability Report (SMAR). The Bureau should be directly involved in the collaboration process through its annual status reports and by including the Board in its evaluation and determination process regarding the quality of existing facilities, facilities renovation, facilities expansion requirements, or new construction required.
- Suggested revision page 3, lines 14-15 subsection 2b(1) - "...determining which schools will no longer be used as schools." The Bureau should have the sole authority to deem a building unsafe, with supporting input from departments including Fire, OSHA, Department of Planning and Natural Resources, and the Department of Health's Environmental Health unit and timely notification to the VIBE.
- Consider adding language that integrates sustainable accountability across each function under the purview of the listed leadership team, i.e., School Construction - during the design and construction of a school, outside agencies/organizations should be encouraged to provide input and resources to help the Bureau; or utilizing technology, subsequent to a renovation or new construction allows the public to check online for the energy saved by the building's solar panels or an aerial view and comparison of the old vs. new campus.
- The Board would support a 10-year Master School Construction and Maintenance plan (Plan) and agrees that it should be updated every five years given changes in our school population, the competing demands, and various funding sources being earmarked for school

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Virgin Islands Board of Education is to provide leadership and oversight, set policy and advocate for continuous improvement of the Public Education System of the Virgin Islands of the United States.

VISION STATEMENT

Each child is provided with the best quality education which guarantees academic excellence, promotes our history and culture, and builds strong local and global communities.

- maintenance with deadlines and use restrictions. The Plan and subsequent status reports should be provided to the VIBE pursuant to its authority under 3 V.I.C. § 96(a)(5) to receive reports on expending federal monies.
- The Board supports a Plan that would allow for long-term continuity of projects irrespective of changes in Bureau leadership team members.
 - The Board agrees with consideration of qualifications beyond an architect and engineer. This Bureau could benefit from persons with education and experience in project management, mechanical and electrical engineering, planning and logistics, construction management, maintenance, and facilities management.

Given its authority through 17 V.I.C. § 21(a)(4) to provide for the proper administration of federal funds granted for any educational purpose, 17 V.I.C. § 21(a)(1) to recommend the establishment of public schools, and 17 V.I.C. § 21(a)(2) and (3) to cooperate with the U.S. Department of Education and administration of federal laws related to general education and approve plans for same, at a minimum the VIBE's Chairperson or designee (i.e., presiding chairperson of its School Plants and Facilities committee should be a voting member of the School Construction and Maintenance Advisory Council. This is based on:

- the language in the legislation related to the Bureau's placement within the Department for "budgetary purposes only;"
- the outlined duties and responsibilities of the Bureau (and its Executive Director);
- the Department's maintenance and engineering division, including all personnel and the portion of the Department's budget allocated for these purposes being transferred to the Bureau;
- the Bureau's oversight of all public educational facilities, including schools, academic centers, facilities, and other structures that will be used for or occupied by students, faculty, staff, and administration; and
- representations by the Department that several of its funding sources include school plants and facilities (i.e., CARES projects and A.R.P. plan includes personnel and contracts for preventive, routine, and emergency maintenance work).

Additionally, we remain conscious of the need for the Bureau to include in its budget ongoing, relevant training for critical maintenance positions beyond the federal award periods (and any extensions), and the Board would support such request.

In conclusion, many have said that learning does not occur in a vacuum. We must plan for school facilities maintenance and ensure that our school buildings are clean, organized, safe, cost-effective, and instructionally supportive. As such, the Board supports the intent of this bill and thanks the honorable Senate President Donna A. Frett-Gregory for bringing forth this meaningful and forward-moving legislation. Chairwoman Whitaker, thank you so much for allowing the Virgin Islands Board of Education to provide testimony. We stand ready to answer questions posed.