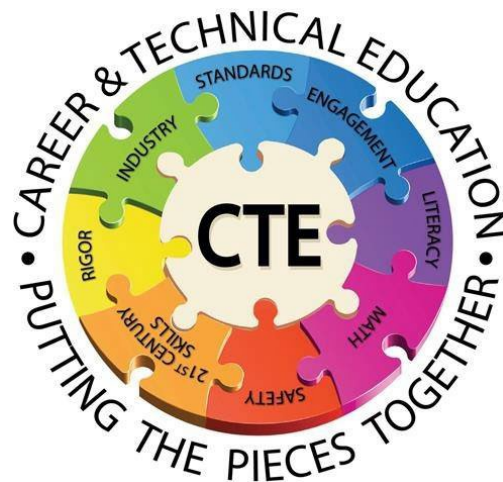


VIRGIN ISLANDS BOARD FOR CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION



Testimony – Genevieve Whitaker, JD, MCJ, MPM CPM®

Executive Director, Virgin Islands Career for Technical Education Board

Committee on Culture, Youth, Aging, Sports, and Parks Hearing

October 31, 2025, | Frits E. Lawaetz Legislative Chamber, St. Croix

1 Good day, Honorable Senator Angel Bolques Jr., Chairman of the Committee,
2 Vice Chair Senator Carla Joseph, other members of the 36th Legislature of the
3 Virgin Islands, fellow testifiers, and members of the listening and viewing
4 audience:

Introduction

5 I am Genevieve Whitaker, Executive Director of the Virgin Islands Career &
6 Technical Education Board (VIBCTE), having officially begun my tenure on
7 October 6, 2025. I am honored to appear before you today to discuss the critical
8 role of Career and Technical Education (CTE) in addressing the opportunity
9 gaps facing our youth and sharing the Board's vision for a more equitable and
10 empowered future. Additionally, I am joined by Board Member
11 and Secretary, Mr. Anthony Mardenborough, Jr. Our youth are navigating a
12 landscape shaped by economic uncertainty, educational disparities, and
13 limited access to meaningful career pathways. CTE is not merely a program—it
14 is a transformative framework that equips students with skills, confidence, and
15 direction to thrive in today's workforce and tomorrow's economy. Since
16 assuming this role, I have prioritized listening, collaboration, and
17 action. I have met with CTE instructors across both districts participated both
18 AFT TEACH events (AFT TEACH, St. Thomas-St. John Local 1825 and AFT TEACH
19 St. Croix Local 1826, and initiated internal communications to bridge
20 longstanding divides. My staff and I have been actively organizing stakeholders
21 meetings, several of which I have already held, to ensure that our efforts reflect
22 the voices and needs of our educators, students, and community partners.

State of CTE in the Virgin Islands

- 23 CTE programs in the Virgin Islands span high-demand sectors such as:
- Health Sciences (CNA, LPN, Phlebotomy, Medical Massage Therapy)
 - Information Technology and Cybersecurity
 - Culinary Arts and Hospitality
 - Automotive and Construction Trades
 - Business and Finance
- 24 These offerings are available across both the St. Croix and St. Thomas–St. John
25 districts. For example, the Raphael O. Wheatley Skill Center offers a range of
26 programs including:
- Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)
 - Clinical Medical Assistant (CMA)
 - Emergency Medical Technician (EMT)
 - Medical Administrative Assistant & Billing and Coding Specialist
 - Patient Care Technician (PCT)
 - Phlebotomy
 - Practical Nursing (LPN)
 - Programs in Human Services, Hospitality & Tourism, Information Technology, Transportation & Logistics, and Architecture & Construction
- 27 Additionally, the St. Croix Career & Technical Education Center (CTEC) offers
28 post-secondary evening courses for adult learners in areas such as:
- Cosmetology
 - NCCER Core
 - Electricity I–IV
 - Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN)
 - Commercial Baking & Cake Decoration
 - HVAC
 - Phlebotomy
 - CDA Child Care
 - Clothing Construction

- Automotive Technology
- Electric Vehicles

Recent Progress and Innovation

- 29** Despite longstanding challenges, the Board has made significant strides:
- Reinstated the National Technical Honor Society (NTHS), including the first adult chapter.
 - Expanded the use of virtual reality career exploration tools, including the relaunch of TransferVR Goggles to bring immersive learning into classrooms.
 - Increased instructor certification rates increased from 15% to over 70% in five years.
 - Implemented a CTE Certification Portal to streamline instructor credentialing.

Challenges and Barriers

- 30** We continue to face systemic challenges:
- Instructor Shortages: Many instructors are nearing retirement, and recruitment is difficult due to competitive industry salaries.
 - Infrastructure Deficits: Facilities and equipment are outdated, limiting hands-on learning and on the job training.
 - Digital Divide: Schools lack reliable internet, impeding access to virtual tools and platforms.
 - Funding Constraints: Budget reallocations have reduced our operating funds, impacting program delivery.

Funding Request

- 31** We are again requesting an appropriation of \$600,000 to establish the “Ms. Lena Schulnerbrandt CTE Fund”, a request that has been presented to the
- 32** Legislature during the last two budget cycles, including our testimony in June
- 33** 2025. This fund is essential to advancing our mission and will support:
- Hiring journeymen and specialists as part-time instructors.
 - Paid internships and apprenticeships for high school students.
 - Emergency equipment repairs and instructional support.
 - CTSO participated through an 80/20 cost-sharing model.
 - Professional certification and appreciation initiatives for instructors.
 - Development of a shared CTE Data Dashboard to track student outcomes and guide policy.
 - Launch of a WorldSkills USVI chapter to expose students to global skill standards.
 - Expansion of school-based and on-the-job training opportunities, ensuring students gain real-world experience in high-demand fields.
 - Strengthening partnerships with the business community, including employer sponsorships and collaborative workforce development initiatives.
 - Continued support for Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs), which play a vital role in developing student leadership, fostering career readiness, and providing opportunities for national competition and recognition. These organizations are essential to building confidence, professionalism, and real-world skills among our youth, and require consistent funding to ensure equitable access and participation across districts.

Strategic Initiatives Underway

- 34 As part of our immediate roadmap, we are:
- Mapping career clusters and expanding pathways in STEM, Legal Studies, Renewable Energy, Marine Trades, and Agribusiness.
 - Initiating dual enrollment discussions with UVI and VI Tech College.
 - Conducting a staff skills audit and planning quarterly professional development workshops.
 - Enhancing communications through a revamped website, monthly newsletters, and social media outreach.
 - Building partnerships with employers to develop structured apprenticeships and internship pipelines.
 - Formalizing interagency collaborations and regional partnerships to position the Virgin Islands as a leader in Caribbean CTE innovation.

Policy Recommendations

- To strengthen CTE-to-career pipelines across the territory, I recommend:
 - Legislative support for expanding CTE infrastructure and staffing.
 - Incentives for employer partnerships and school-based apprenticeships.
 - Integration of CTE with academic curricula to reduce redundancy and improve alignment.
 - Territory-wide data collection and analysis to inform future investments.

Supporting Statistics

- 35 According to the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) Career and Technical Education (CTE) produce strong, evidence-based outcomes for students nationwide:
- The average high school graduation rate for CTE concentrators who complete multiple courses within a CTE program area—is 96%, compared to the national average of 85%.
 - In 2024, 152 state-level policies were enacted across 40 states to expand and strengthen CTE programs, reflecting bipartisan support for workforce and education alignment.
 - Dropout Reduction: CTE participation is strongly associated with reduced dropout rates and improved student engagement.

Sources:

Association for Career and Technical Education. CTE Works! Fact Sheet (February 2024). https://www.acteonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/ACTE_CTEWorks_FactSheet_Feb2024.pdf

Advance CTE & ACTE. State Policies Impacting CTE: 2024 Year in Review (February 2025). https://careertech.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/CTE_2024YIR_02_022025.pdf

- 36 These outcomes underscore the vital role of CTE in preparing students for post-
37 secondary education, high-demand careers, and long-term economic success.

Conclusion

38 CTE is not a separate track—it is a vital, integrated component of a
39 comprehensive education system. By investing in CTE, we are investing in the
40 future of our youth and the economic resilience of the Virgin Islands. I urge this
41 Committee to support our funding requests and policy recommendations to
42 ensure that every student has access to the tools, training, and opportunities
43 they need to succeed. Before I conclude my testimony, I want to express my
44 deep gratitude to our dedicated staff. Their unwavering commitment and day-
45 to-day excellence makes this work possible, in advancing Career and Technical
46 Education (CTE). I also extend my sincere appreciation to our Board Members,
47 whose diligence, leadership, and vision continue to move CTE forward for the
48 benefit of our students, employers, and communities. I also want to
49 acknowledge all our local CTE leaders across the Territory—our Principals,
50 Coordinators, programs and department Chairs—whose leadership and
51 advocacy ensure that CTE remains a priority in every school and program.
52 And, I commend our CTE student leaders and students at large for their
53 determination and passion to pursue their education and credentials. Your
54 efforts inspire us and drive this mission forward.

Thank you for your time and continued commitment to our youth. I remain available to answer any questions you may have.