



# 36<sup>th</sup> Legislature of the United States Virgin Islands

The Honorable  
**KURT A. VIALET**  
Majority Leader

Gloryvee Christian-  
Krieger  
Chief of Staff

Samanta Prentice  
Legislative Researcher

Janella John  
Communications  
Manager

**COMMITTEE CHAIR**  
Education and Workforce  
Development

**COMMITTEE MEMBER**  
Health, Hospitals &  
Human Services


Disaster Recovery,  
Infrastructure & Planning

Housing, Transportation,  
& Telecommunications

Budget, Appropriations  
and Finance

## Memorandum

**TO:** Mrs. Kurell A. Sheridan, JD  
Executive Director  
36<sup>th</sup> Legislature of the Virgin Islands

**FROM:** The Honorable Kurt A. Vialet   
Chairman, Committee on Education & Workforce Development

**DATE:** May 13, 2025

**RE:** Committee Report for Friday, May 9, 2025 Meeting

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Please find attached the report for the Committee on Education and Workforce Development (EWD) meeting held on Friday, March 9, 2025, in the Earle B. Ottley Legislative Chambers, St. Thomas.

cc: All Senators  
Chief Legal Counsel  
Archive Division  
Journal Division

## EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT MAY 9, 2025 - COMMITTEE HEARING REPORT

The Committee on Education and Workforce Development convened its meeting on Friday, May 9, 2025, in the Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall, St. Thomas.

***Call to order:***

*Chairman, Senator Kurt A. Violet called the meeting to order at 10:12 a.m.*

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**Committee Members Present:**

Senator Kurt A. Violet  
Senator Dwayne M. DeGraff  
Senator Franklin D. Johnson  
Senator Carla Joseph

**Non-Committee Members Present:**

Senator Novelle E. Francis, Jr.

*Excused:* Senator Kenneth L. Gittens  
Senator Marise C. James

**Committee Staff:**

Gloryvee Christian-Krieger, Chief of Staff  
Samanta Prentice, Legislative Researcher

**Clerk/Timekeeper:**

Janella John, Communications Manager

**Protocol officer:**

Pastor Charles Browne

**Legal Counsel:**

Not Assigned

**Sergeant-At-Arms:**

Chief Terrance Manning  
Officer Tasha Forbes

**Legislative Reporters:**

Part I - Vashti Gerald-Berry  
Part II - Nadine Williams  
Part III – Nataya Munoz  
Part IV - Vashti Gerald-Berry  
Part V – Nadine Williams

**Public Affairs/ Media:**

Eustace Brown  
Alwyn Baptiste, Jr.  
Alvin Burke  
Bernard Matthew, Sr.  
Jamal Potter  
Chaunte Herbert  
Barry Leerdam  
Kashief Hamilton  
Melissa Gustave

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The Committee on Education and Workforce Development received testimonies:

**BLOCK I**

During the committee hearing on the status of special education programs in the territory's public schools, a panel of leaders delivered testimony addressing local and federal funding challenges, as well as the role of participating service providers. The Honorable Dionne

Wells-Hedrington, Ph.D., Commissioner of the Virgin Islands Department of Education, provided critical insight into the department's current strategies and needs. Karen H. Brown, Ph.D., MPH, CCC-SLP, Dean of the University of the Virgin Islands, and Suzanne Darrow-Magras, Ph.D., Director of the University of the Virgin Islands Center for Excellence in Leadership and Learning, offered valuable perspectives on educational training and support initiatives. Jean Forde., Assistant Commissioner of the Virgin Islands Department of Labor, addressed workforce readiness and vocational training for students with disabilities. Rounding out the discussion, Kishma Francis, Esq., Staff Attorney for the Disability Rights Center of the Virgin Islands, passionately advocated for the protection and advancement of students' rights within the special education system.

## **BLOCK II**

The hearing also highlighted the operational and contractual challenges faced by service providers. Dr. Jody Miller, EdD, BCBA, Director of Coral Reef Academy, spoke candidly about the obstacles in special education testing, ongoing contract issues, and the persistent delays in payments that directly impact services for students. Mardly Smith, Owner and Recruiter of Orange Tree Staffing, echoed concerns regarding recruitment and retention barriers tied to funding uncertainties. Julie Sommer, MS, OTR/L, Occupational Therapist and Director of JS Therapies, provided testimony on the difficulties of delivering consistent occupational therapy services amid administrative and financial constraints.

## **COMMITTEE REQUESTS:**

Committee on education and workforce development through the chair requests and suggestions.

### **Block I**

#### **Requests:**

1. Senator Kurt Violet is requesting the cost for the Department of Education's summer special education testing.
2. Senator Avery Lewis is requesting that the Department of Education follow up with the Bureau of School Maintenance and Construction regarding the completion of the sensory room at Yvonne E. Milliner-Bowsky school on St. Thomas.
3. Senator Dwayne DeGraff requested a copy of the Nadine Jones Consent decree.

#### **Suggestions:**

1. Suggestion from Senator Kurt Violet - Consider providing a stipend for mainstream classroom teachers, responsible for educating students with special education needs alongside their general education responsibilities.
2. Suggestion from Commissioner Dionne Wells-Hedrington-Review the language of the bill concerning the employment of retired teachers to help address the teacher shortage during the summer months.
3. Suggestion from Deputy Commissioner Andrea Shillingford: eliminate the Professional Practice in psychology examination for school-based psychologists

### **Block II**

#### **Requests**

1. Senator Dwayne DeGraff requested details on outstanding invoices from Coral Reef Academy, Orange Tree Staffing and JS Therapies.

2. Senator Carla Joseph requested a listing of schools serviced by Orange Tree Staffing.

***Adjournment:***

*Chairman, Senator Kurt A. Vialet adjourned the Committee on Education and Workforce Development hearing at **5:32 p.m.***