



36th Legislature of the United States Virgin Islands Committee on Education and Workforce Development

Memorandum

MEMBERS

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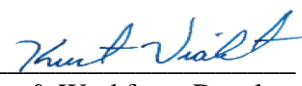
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TO: Mrs. Kurell A. Sheridan, JD
Executive Director
36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands

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

DATE: June 18, 2025

RE: **Committee Report for Tuesday, June 17, 2025, Meeting**

Please find attached the report for the Committee on Education and Workforce Development (EWD) meeting held on Tuesday, June 17, 2025, in the Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall, St. Thomas.

cc: All Senators
Chief Legal Counsel
Archive Division
Journal Division

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT June 17, 2025 - COMMITTEE MEETING REPORT

The Committee on Education and Workforce Development convened its meeting on Tuesday, June 17, in the Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall, St. Thomas.

Call to order:

Chairman, Senator Kurt A. Violet called the meeting to order at 9:12 a.m.

Committee Members Present:

Senator Kurt A. Violet
Senator Avery L. Lewis
Senator Marise C. James
Senator Dwayne M. DeGraff
Senator Franklin D. Johnson
Senator Kenneth L. Gittens
Senator Carla J. Joseph

Non-Committee Members Present:

Senator Marvin Blyden
Senator Novelle E. Francis, Jr.

Committee Staff:

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

Legal Counsel:

Attorney Augustin Ayala

Clerk/Timekeeper:

Janella John, Communications Manager

Protocol Officer:

Jervon Ottley
Pastor Charles Browne

Sergeant-At-Arms:

Walton Jack, Jr. (STX)
Delvin Fleming (STT)

Public Affairs/ Media:

Eustace Brown
Alwyn Baptiste, Jr.
Alvin Burke
Melissa Gustave
Bernard Matthew, Sr.
Diana Cruz
Chaunte Herbert
Omari Hicks
Kashief Hamilton
Jamal Potter
Dequan Milliner
Jahmel Leonard
Barry Leerdam

Legislative Reporters:

Part I – Natanya Munoz
Part II – Tricia D. Sealey
Part III - Joanne Samuel
Part IV - Vashti Gerald-Berry
Part V – Nadine Williams

The Committee on Education and Workforce Development received testimonies:

BLOCK I

Mr. Craig Benjamin, Executive Director of the Bureau of School Construction and Maintenance, reported 51 planned or active summer projects in the St. Thomas-St. John District and over 80 in

the St. Croix District. These include roof repairs, HVAC upgrades, restroom renovations, structural fixes, and campus improvements. Priority was given to health and safety, code compliance, and infrastructure readiness. The Bureau targeted quick, cost-effective projects like minor plumbing and carpentry, coordinating with the Department of Education to align with FEMA funding. All projects are scheduled for completion by July 31, 2025.

Vice Chairperson Emmanuella Perez-Cassius of the Virgin Islands Board of Education testified that the Board's authority over school facilities has shifted to the Bureau, narrowing its focus to curriculum oversight. She highlighted system strengths such as CTE programs, teacher effectiveness, and inclusive practices, but also cited serious issues—curriculum inconsistencies, overcrowded classrooms, poor learning environments, and overuse of standardized tests. The Board called for urgent reforms, strategic funding, and collaboration to address the challenges facing public education.

BLOCK II

The committee reviewed **Bill No. 36-0049**, which would establish a Bureau of School Security within the Department of Education. Assistant Commissioner Victor Somme III supported the intent, highlighting the need for a standardized, coordinated school safety approach. He noted a shortage of police personnel and said a dedicated bureau could improve interagency collaboration. However, Somme expressed concern over the lack of funding, the financial strain on VIDE, and the need to better train existing monitors. He stated the Department could not support the measure at this time.

Director Gleston McIntosh of POST, Vice Chairperson Emmanuella Perez-Cassius of the Board of Education, and Assistant Commissioner of VIPD Sean Santos all opposed the bill. McIntosh warned of overlapping duties and urged investment in counselors, training, and improved School Resource Officer protocols. Perez-Cassius said the bill lacked clarity, overlooked mental health needs, and risked over-disciplining Black students, who already face disproportionate disciplinary actions. Santos called the bill inefficient and instead proposed enhancing the Auxiliary Officer Program for school-based law enforcement. Ultimately, **Bill No. 36-0049 was held in committee for further review.**

Senators also reviewed Bill No. 36-0064, sponsored by Senator Kurt Vialet, which seeks to amend Title 33, Chapter 111, Section 3100i of the Virgin Islands Code. The bill aligns the disbursement and spending limitations of the Education Initiative Fund with the practical needs of academic planning, aiming to ensure that funds are used effectively to support student achievement.

Assistant Commissioner Victor Somme III of the Virgin Islands Department of Education supported the measure, noting that it would eliminate the restrictive “use it or lose it” rule and allow funds to roll over across fiscal years for more strategic planning. He emphasized the importance of flexibility in addressing operational needs and improving outcomes. Somme also recommended several enhancements, including clearer definitions of eligible expenses, caps on spending, emergency spending protocols, and a funding formula based on school size. He advocated for dedicated funding for district administration and athletics, along with stronger oversight—such as monthly financial reports, annual audits, and penalties for violations. The

measure was seen as a key step toward empowering school leaders, improving transparency, and making public education dollars go further. **Bill No. 36-0064 was passed favorably.**

COMMITTEE REQUESTS:

1. Senator Kurt Vialet requested a report from the Bureau of School Construction and Maintenance to share with school leadership and union representatives.
2. Senator Novelle E. Francis, Jr. requested a detailed status update on the work being done at each school, including projected completion timelines.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Senator Kurt Vialet proposed amending Bill No. 8717 to formally include VIBE in the structure for ongoing updates and discussions.
- Senator Carla Joseph recommended utilizing graduates from the Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs and the Skills Center to perform tasks typically assigned to contractors, as a cost-saving measure.
- Senator Dwayne DeGraff suggested that the Bureau of School Construction and Maintenance develop a standardized daily maintenance checklist for each school.

Adjournment:

Chairman, Senator Kurt A. Vialet adjourned the Committee on Education and Workforce Development meeting at 5:06 p.m.