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Man Ousted For Failure to Manage Federal School Grants in D.C. is Part of Company Hired to Manage Federal School Grants in USVI

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Victor Vyfhuis, a principal with BCA and project manager for the \$2.6 million annual contract with the government of the Virgin Islands. By. VI LEGISLATURE

A company named Bazilio Cobb Associates (BCA), which was hired by the Government of the Virgin Islands almost ten years ago to perform the job of making the VI Dept. of Education come into compliance with a U.S. Department of Education Compliance agreement, has as one of its executives an individual who in 2007 was fired from his role of director of D.C. public schools federal grants. The U.S. D.O.E. compliance agreement demands that the V.I. Dept. of Education resolve 25 special conditions for the local government to continue receiving federal funding for education.

Victor Vyfhuis, [a principal with BCA](#) and one of the project managers for the \$2.6 million annual contract with the government of the Virgin Islands, was in charge of hundreds of millions of dollars in federal grants for D.C. public schools, according to the [Washington Examiner](#). The publication's government sources at the time said Mr. Vyfhuis was publicly condemned by Victor Reinoso, then-deputy mayor for education in D.C. and a former member of the D.C. Board of Education, "for playing fast and loose with federal money."

"Every time there was budget pressure, they would come back and say, 'Oh, we've reprogrammed a grant,'" Mr. Reinoso said at the time, according to the Washington Examiner.

The federal funding is critical to the survival of the U.S. Virgin Islands' education system, and the local government, just from payments to BCA alone, has spent an estimated \$24.7 million to rectify the conditions. Yet after almost 10 years with BCA and 14 years altogether, the GVI has yet to come into compliance, and senator after senator piled on representatives of BCA, including company CEO Ralph B. Bazilio, another USVI Project Manager for BCA, Mariana Jalloh, and Mr. Vyfhuis.

During the hearing on Tuesday, Mr. Vyfhuis said he joined BCA in 2010. Asked about his previous jobs by Senator Kenneth Gittens, Mr. Vyfhuis said, "ooh, a number of places," and revealed that he was employed with the D.C. government as director of federal grants between 2004-2007.

"The school system you ran had been rated as high risk for federal funds because of years of neglect, mismanagement and corruption," said Mr. Gittens, reading from a document. Asked if what was read by the senator was true, Mr. Vyfhuis said, "Yes, that's what the record says, yes."

"I was removed and I was part of a team that was establishing the Office of the States Superintendent of Education," Mr. Vyfhuis said.

BCA, which has offices in a number of jurisdictions, in 2012 saw its Maryland office being raided by federal agents, Sen. Gittens revealed. Mr. Bazilio said the company's professional services has never been challenged. "That incident in 2012 was as a result of an investigation conducted by the U.S. Dept. of Justice into campaign violations. Our former chairman and CEO was engaged and that is why the U.S. Dept. of Justice came to our office. As a result of that, we removed the gentleman at the time, and he has never, ever been associated with the firm since," Mr. Bazilio said.

Mr. Gittens said the GVI must start scrutinizing the firms it does business with.

"Colleagues and people of the Virgin Islands, again, we have to take a look at who we are doing business with in the Virgin Islands. Our children, in this case with this third-party fiduciary, is getting the short end of the stick. There's no progress for the last ten years. It is time for us to do things differently, he said.

Mr. Bazilio said BCA services were procured by the GVI through a competitive bidding process via request for proposal at the Dept. of Property and Procurement.

BCA's current contract will expire on Oct. 30, 2020. Office of Management and Budget Director, Jenifer O'Neal, said the scope of work is tied to the 25 special conditions that the U.S. Department of Education is demanding for the V.I. Dept. of Education to come into compliance.

Earlier during the Tuesday hearing, Ms. O'Neal said that as part of the agreement with the U.S. D.O.E., the GVI had to hire third-party fiduciaries to help the government come into compliance, with BCA scoring the major contract nearly 10 years ago to help manage U.S. D.O.E. grant funds awarded to the territory — along with making sure the 25 special conditions were met. More recently, BCA was tasked with training local individuals to manage grant funds so as to relieve the local government of the \$2.6 million annual cost, under a so-called self-contained model. That process includes six phases that must be completed before the local employees could takeover, but Ms. O'Neal has not been satisfied with the pace of the training. She also protested BCA's lack of presence in the territory to train the local employees.

"Training should have ended by the end of December [2019] and it still has not been completed," Ms. O'Neal said. "So for me, I think the pace is too slow and I think that Mr. Bazilio, BCA staff being here for two weeks and then they're gone for two weeks, makes it hard. We have staff who are also going to take vacations, they have sick days, they have whatever...So the timing just doesn't work when people are in and out all the time... So the training just isn't happening as fast as I'd like the training to happen."