

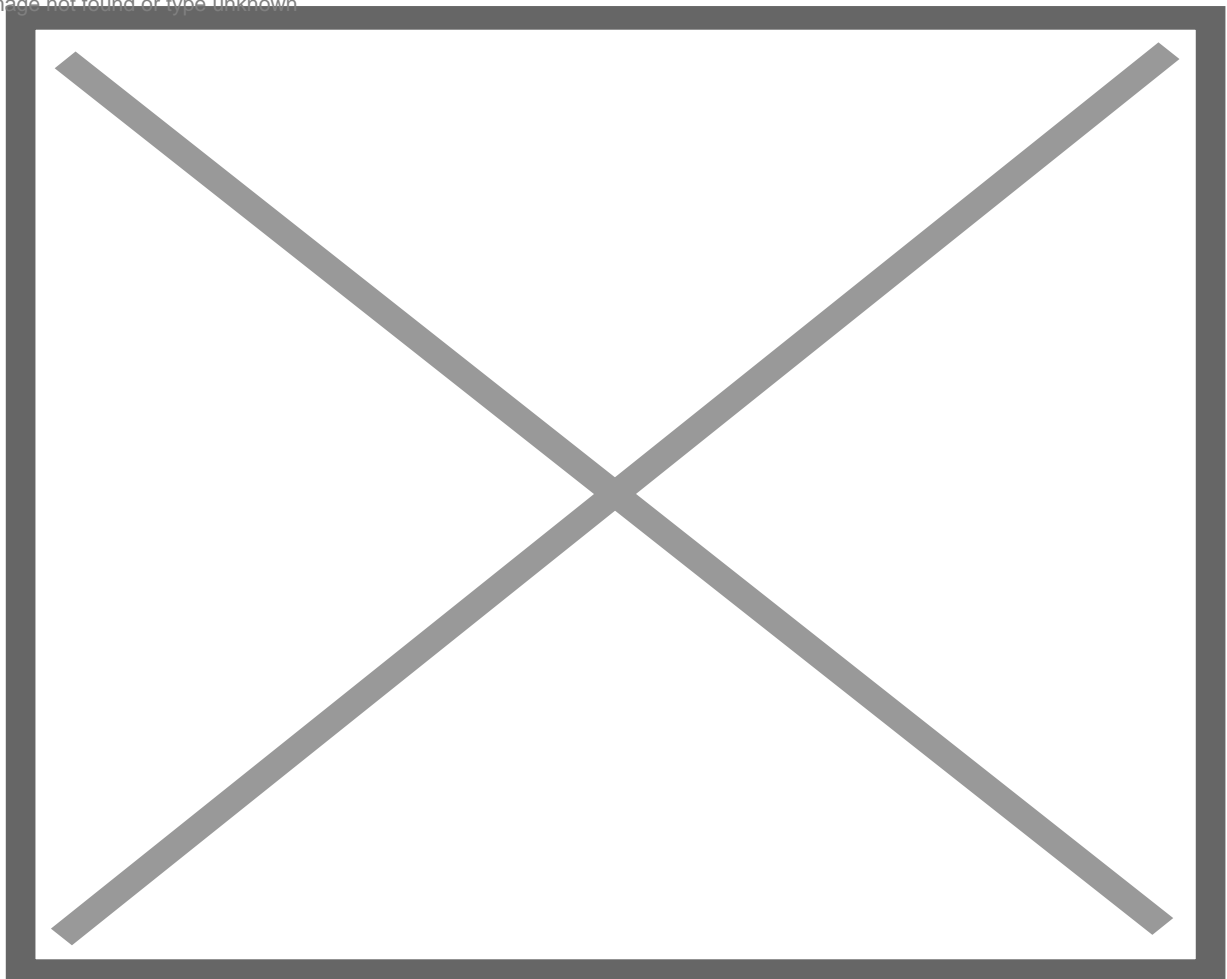
USVI Struggles to Boost Workforce Development Programs

Senator Johnson highlights the importance of financial incentives for youth engagement

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Amidst ongoing efforts to enhance workforce development in the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Committee on Education and Workforce Development convened to address the challenges faced by these initiatives. Despite being offered free of charge, the programs struggle to attract participants, prompting lawmakers to seek solutions.

Senator Dwyane DeGraff expressed his concerns, stating, “It doesn't seem like there is a workforce development problem in the territory... but then we also hear contrary.” He questioned why local youth were not taking advantage of these opportunities, suggesting that improved outreach might be key.

Commissioner of the Department of Labor, Gary Molloy, echoed these sentiments, emphasizing the department's focus on outreach, particularly in housing developments. However, the issue of attracting participants remains complex, with Senator Franklin Johnson pointing out the younger generation's desire for immediate financial incentives.

Highlighting a significant setback, Joann Murphy, chair of the Virgin Islands Career and Technical Education Board, lamented the discontinuation of a legislative stipend fund that provided financial support to students in on-the-job training. She appealed to the lawmakers to reinstate the \$30,000 allocation to each secondary school, which is part of a broader effort to raise \$250,000 for the Lena Schulerbrandt fund. This fund aims to offer stipends to journeymen students, thereby bridging the existing gap in practical training.

Senator Marvin Blyden, while not committing to funding the journeyman program, acknowledged the importance of having established journeymen in the territory and discussed introducing legislation to support this. In the interim, he urged for better collaboration among workforce development providers to ensure cohesive efforts and minimize redundancy.