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Years of Inaction Followed by Rapid Tablet Program Launch in V.I. Draws Scrutiny

Heritage wireless' inexperience and omission of ACP's end in Education Dept.'s plan draws legislative eyebrows

Government / **Published On January 30, 2024 06:10 AM /**

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Following this weekend's announcement by the V.I. Department of Education of a partnership with Heritage Wireless to provide [free tablets to eligible students](#), lawmakers are raising concerns about the form, function, and impact of the rollout.

Consortium journalists have seen correspondence sent between legislative staffers attached to the offices of Senators Marvin Blyden and Marise James, raising questions about what they allege is the undue speed at which the program was pushed out to the public, the lack of clear guidance and information to the public, and the propriety of the arrangements with one company.

On Saturday, the press release by D.O.E. announcing the launch of the program, which mentioned Sen. Donna Frett-Gregory as part of the collaboration, indicated that students enrolled in Free and Reduced Breakfast and Lunch programs are some of those eligible to receive free tablets and internet services as a result of the partnership with Heritage. “The initiative is part of the US Affordable Connectivity Program [ACP], a \$15 billion congressional effort to support low-income Americans,” the announcement read. The ACP, however, will expire by [the end of May](#), unless Congress acts to extend it; [legislation to that effect](#) has already been introduced in the Senate. However the Federal Control Commission is currently winding down the ACP; closing enrollment applications on February 7, and scheduling notices to households.

Local Senate staffers say that this late-stage announcement from the Dept. of Education, Frett-Gregory and [Heritage Wireless](#) does not mention the program’s possible end as early as April 2024, according to the FCC’s current calculations about when the program runs out of money.

Further, the correspondence raises questions about why the department's announcement essentially directed parents to only one service provider. Education officials themselves reportedly noted in a recent meeting with Mr. Blyden that the department had been approached by Liberty some years ago, with Viya representatives reportedly claiming that they too had reached out to the department and been ignored.

The email circulated among legislative staffers, and copied to Senators Blyden and James, suggests that rollout of the partnership between the Dept. of Education and Heritage Wireless, from initiation to public announcement, took place in less than 24 hours, and questions whether proper procurement process was followed in this instance.

Responding to a request for comment, Sen. James noted according to a copy of the Heritage Wireless contract presented to her by a resident, customers are asked to grant the company a limited power of attorney, allowing it to “monitor and support the approval” of the application, verbiage she said “raises red flags for me.” She believes that the Department of Education “lacks understanding of the ACP and believes that the program will continue for another three years.” The move to partner with a provider so that eligible students should have been done two years ago, said Ms. James, “without naming a preferred provider.”

Consortium journalists have reached out to Ms. Frett-Gregory, who was credited for her role in facilitating the partnership between VIDE and Heritage, for more information. Comment has also been sought from Sen. Blyden.

Heritage Wireless Group, Inc. is a company based in Miami, Florida. Incorporated on February 14, 2023, it is a foreign for-profit entity registered under the number F23000000940. The company is located at 601 Brickell Key Drive, Miami, FL, 33131, USA. Managed by a single person, Bobbi Alston, who holds the position of DP (Director/President), Heritage Wireless Group, Inc. has been operational for a year. The company's registered agent is Spiegel & Utrera, P.A., located at 1840 SW 22nd Street, 4th Floor, Miami, FL, 33145.