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Dept. of Education and Senator Frett-Gregory Under Scrutiny for Heritage Wireless Partnership

The Dept. of Education and Frett-Gregory yet to clarify their stance on Heritage Wireless amidst Alston's "Trail of Tears"

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Senator Donna Frett-Gregory By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

After the V.I. Dept. of Education announced over the weekend that it will work with internet service provider Heritage Wireless — which was introduced to the department by Senator Donna Frett-Gregory — to issue free devices to eligible students, questions began to arise almost immediately about the nature of the partnership and the announcement.

Information received from the offices of Senators Marvin Blyden and Marise James suggested that lawmakers were displeased about the seeming platforming of one company by the Dept. of

Education, when all providers in the territory can work within the framework of the Affordable Connectivity Plan, or ACP, to offer free or reduced cost broadband access or devices to eligible participants.

The senators also criticized the department for being overly vague with the Saturday announcement, which failed to inform the public that funding for the ACP is set to expire within the next few months, at which point any benefits under the program would cease.

The alarm bell was also rung over what the lawmakers considered to be a hastily struck deal between D.O.E. and Heritage Wireless, which reportedly took fewer than 24 hours from conception to inception and roll-out via the department's Saturday press release.

With this information, Consortium journalists set out to learn more about Heritage Wireless, and discovered that the company was incorporated just last year - January 11, 2023 in Delaware. Bobbi Alston, listed as the company's director and president, does not have a robust online presence, but Corey Alston, a Fort Lauderdale, Florida native, does.

A newspaper in Broward County, Florida [published an article](#) in February 2023 which named Corey Alston — not Bobbi — as a representative of Heritage Wireless. A profile on [a resume site](#) names Corey Alston's parents as Louis and Bobbi Ann Alston, and provides a photo of Corey Alston which corresponds with images of former South Bay city manager Corey Alston, who pleaded guilty to grand theft and corrupt misuse of an official position in September 2014.

As part of the plea deal, Mr. Alston reimbursed the city \$48,000 in improper charges. Reporting from the Palm Beach Post in March of 2015 claims that even after his guilty plea, Mr. Alston maintained his innocence, saying that he [chose to take a plea deal](#) because he feared that a black man would not be treated fairly in Florida's criminal justice system.

Additionally, the Broward County School board voted to close Alston's two charter schools – the Obama Academy for Boys and Red Shoe Charter School for Girls – after they failed to properly document how almost \$900,000 in taxpayer money was being spent. After the schools closed in 2016, reporting in the Sun Sentinel indicated that the two institutions had racked up approximately \$1.8 million in [debts to the state](#).

Following Mr. Alston's guilty plea, the Alston Insurance Group, which he owned and operated, had its [insurance license revoked](#) by Florida's Chief Financial Officer. Alston Insurance Group traded under the name Heritage Insurance.

In 2019, Corey Alston was reportedly [arrested and charged](#) with fraud and theft in connection with allegations that Urban Academy, the parent company of his two charter schools, filed fraudulent applications to the Gardiner Scholarship program, administered by the educational non-profit Step Up for Students. The fake scholarship applications netted Mr. Alston and the Urban Academy almost \$560,000, reports indicate.

More criminal charges followed in 2023. In April of that year, Corey Alston was charged as an alleged conspirator in a [Covid testing fraud](#). Federal prosecutors allege that from around July 2022 to February 2023, Mr. Alston, who operated a business named Heritage Pharma Group, along with a doctor registered in the state of Florida, bought lists of patients' Medicare ID numbers, ordered Covid tests to their addresses, and then billed the government for those tests. Trial in this matter is set for July 8 in the Florida Middle District Court.

Two months later, Mr. Alston was indicted in Georgia for an alleged racketeering scheme in Georgia. The June 27, 2023 [indictment](#) alleges that Corey Alston defrauded the Georgia Department of Community affairs “unlawfully taking and receiving money from DCA for a non-existent web product, providing false statements to DCA leadership, and paying bribes to State employees. Alston reportedly conspired with an employee of DCA to use “her procurement authority to enter and approve a contract for the development of a web product and to falsely affirm the completion, delivery and use of the non-existent web product.”

Mr. Alston, aside from his criminal liability, has had to defend himself from numerous civil lawsuits as well. The former member of the Florida A&M University board of directors was sued in 2013 by a woman who claimed that he [offered to buy her property](#), then issued a series of checks which allegedly bounced. The woman’s attorney, John Rayson, described the matter as a “trail of tears,” disclosing that the woman was subsequently hit with a series of foreclosure letters following Alston’s failure to pay.

With a link between the Bobbi Alston named in Heritage Wireless registration documents and Corey Alston seemingly established by the article in the West Side Gazette, the laundry list of Mr. Alston’s alleged and admitted criminal activity raises serious questions about Senator Frett-Gregory's and the Dept. of Education's due diligence in partnering with Heritage Wireless, alongside the other procedural questions about how the partnership was rolled out.

Efforts to reach Education officials and Mr. Alston on the matter have thus far been unsuccessful. Ms. Frett-Gregory, who was praised by Education for her instrumental role in making introductions and facilitating the partnership, has similarly not responded to requests for comment.