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Carlos McGregor, St. Croix Superintendent of Schools, Calls Police to Remove AFT President From Arthur A. Richards School Premises. It Backfired.

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From left: Two police officers, Rosa Soto-Thomas, and Carlos McGregor. Mr. McGregor had called police to remove Mrs. Soto-Thomas from the Arthur A. Richards K-8 Compound. By. ERNICE GILBERT/ VI CONSORTIUM

ST. CROIX — Carlos McGregor, who was installed as superintendent of schools for the St. Croix District by Governor Albert Bryan, called on V.I. Police Department officers Friday morning to forcefully remove the St. Croix District American Federation of Teachers President, Rosa Soto-Thomas, from the premises of the Arthur A. Richards K-8 School, a move that eventually backfired as Mrs. Soto-Thomas and others were allowed to be part of the meeting.

Mr. McGregor said the meeting was held to inform staff about steps the Dept. of Education plans on taking before reopening the school, which was [shuttered on Friday](#) because of an odor that has been permeating classrooms and causing faculty and staff to fall ill. It was revealed on Friday that the odor has been a problem from about five months ago, but D.O.E. had yet to close the facility even as students and teachers continued to get sick. At one point, some teachers were holding classes outside the classrooms.

The teachers wanted Mrs. Soto-Thomas to be part of the meeting. And as the head of AFT, Mrs. Soto-Thomas said it was her right to learn about the Department of Education's plans to rectify the situation, as her members were the ones being affected.

But Mr. McGregor refused for over an hour to allow the meeting to start with the AFT leader present. Asked by the Consortium why, he said it was a staff meeting and she was not invited. Pressed on why Mrs. Soto-Thomas could not sit-in on a meeting whose topic was D.O.E.'s course of action to solve the problem at the school, Mr. McGregor simply reiterated that she was not invited to be part of the staff meeting, and because she decided not to leave the premises, he called the police to remove her.

Two officers visited the compound to try and rectify the matter. At first, they appeared to be asking the AFT leader to leave, but she refused. The officers then tried to resolve the matter between the two amicably, but that too initially posed a challenge. Thereafter, one of the officers made a phone call and appeared to relay the scene at the school to the person on the other line — including that the media was present. The officers then had another talk with Mrs. Soto-Thomas and Mr. McGregor, at which point it was agreed that Mrs. Soto-Thomas could stay.

A video of the incident captured by the Consortium was posted on the publication's [Facebook platform](#), and responders have been castigating Mr. McGregor for his actions.

"Mr. McGregor, you are out of order!! Any person regardless parents, community leaders, union leaders, etc, etc, should be allowed to sit in on all meetings at a school that affects the public safety of the children. What is there to hide?" [said](#) Barbara Isaac.

"I can't understand why the superintendent refuses the presence of the president of the AFT in the meetings. I can't with y'all. I just can't. Who chooses or elect these characters?!" [said](#) Marcus Williams.

"He made himself look like a damn fool. She is there representing her members. Now he just gave her a platform and more support!" [said](#) Cathalina John-Baptiste.

Mrs. Soto-Thomas, before taking a seat among the teachers to listen to the Dept. of Education's plans, castigated Mr. McGregor and the D.O.E.

"I know one thing, I have a right to be here to represent these members, and no one is going to remove me from the premises this morning," Mrs. Soto-Thomas began while looking into a Consortium camera.

She then took direct aim at the superintendent: "Carlos McGregor keeps giving the public and the members here, the parents, a six for a nine. From the time this school opened, this complete modular facility, portables, they've had problems. The contractors gave [the Dept. of Education] a six for a nine and they need to hold them accountable. AECOM and all the subcontractors did not do what they were supposed to do. The HVAC units in all these classrooms are messing up. The fresh air is not flowing through like it's supposed to. In all the classrooms, the

volatile organic compounds are permeating the classrooms."

Dionne Wells-Hedrington, Department of Education chief operations officer spoke during the meeting on Friday, and said teachers and students would not be allowed back into the facility until the problem was solved. If it can't be immediately rectified, she said, a contingency plan would have to be developed fast. She received applause from the teachers for those remarks.

D.O.E. said it was partnering with a number of government departments and agencies — the Dept. of Health, the Dept. of Planning and Natural Resources and others — to form a task force whose aim would be to identify and rectify the matter. Mrs. Wells-Hedrington said AECOM was paid millions of dollars to build the Arthur A. Richards K-8 modular units, and that the Dept. of Education's warranty had expired, a hint that any repairs would have to be paid for by D.O.E..

Senator Kurt Vialet, who was present at the meeting, bucked.

"The federal government, through the Department of Education, etc, we have paid \$97 million for modulars, and AECOM has billed this government for an additional \$100 million-plus that is being contended right now. It is not the Department of Education's responsibility for units that were installed here that are defective. We need to file with the Attorney General a case against AECOM for brining defective units to the Virgin Islands," Mr. Vialet said.

The meeting ended with no timeline for Arthur A. Richards K-8 School to reopen.