

With Diminishing Career Technical Education Opportunities in USVI Schools, Board Seeks \$600,000 from Government

Amidst a significant decline in CTE programs due to teacher shortages and lack of funding, the Board of Career and Technical Education in the USVI requests \$600,000 to support pilot programs and reverse this trend

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Career and technical education opportunities continue to dwindle in the territory, mostly due to teacher shortages and lack of funding, said Joane Murphy, chair of the territory's Board of Career and Technical Education.

“We are facing a significant problem. We are losing our CTE instructors and those positions are not being readily filled due to a teacher shortage, especially in CTE where former instructors can double their teacher salary and private industry,” Ms. Murphy told lawmakers on Monday.?

She was testifying before the Senate committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance, defending her agency’s FY 2025 budget request of \$1,284,681. That sum includes just under \$690,000 to support personnel and other operating costs for the board, as well as an additional \$600,000 in funding for pilot programs aimed at reversing the decline.?

“Since 2002, CTE programs have been reduced by 50%,” Ms. Murphy disclosed, contrasting the six or seven pre-CTE programs available in each junior high school in 2002, with the three available currently “if we’re lucky.” She cited a long list of programs that have been shuttered at one or more schools, including in industries identified as priorities by government: architectural drafting, construction technology, carpentry, certified nursing assistant, licensed practical nursing, and agriculture, among many more.

“To address these challenges, we must explore other means of providing instruction to our students, including bringing in journeymen, sharing instructional time through technology and partnering with businesses to offer internships for high school students,” Ms. Murphy said. This would represent a “significant shift” in strategy for the CTE board, requiring funding for programs to pilot that shift.

The board’s Lena Schulterbrandt fund can address these challenges, Ms. Murphy said, but would require a \$600,000 injection of funds to accomplish its objectives. “The fund will be used to administer the program by identifying a minimum of three schools in each district that will utilize shared instructional programming using classroom technology,” she told lawmakers. In addition, the fund would support “industry internships, preferably paid by both this fund and the employer,” as well as “groups of students and CTE programs [and] four to six journeyman instructors to support classroom learning.”

?During the discussion that followed her testimony, Senator Marise James asked about the possibility of the CTE board receiving similar grants to a recent \$400,000 award from the Department of the Interior given to a private entity. Ms. Murphy responded that to achieve this, the agency would need to fill a vacancy for grant monitor. However, she said that the Board had been in conversation with the private company to see if CTE students could participate.

Adding to the board’s challenges is the fact that some money for the development of career and technical education in the territory is inaccessible to the CTE board. Executive Director Anton Doos III confirmed to lawmakers that the board cannot tap into “the amount of career technical education funding that comes through either the Department of Education or the State Department of Career, Technical and Adult Education.”?

This revelation prompted consternation from committee chair Senator Donna Frett-Gregory, who called the discussion about the lack of communication and coordination between agencies a “broken record.” She urged the entities to address the issue between themselves, noting that “us giving funding to the CTE board does not resolve the issues that we have, with the lack of collaboration between the two entities.”