

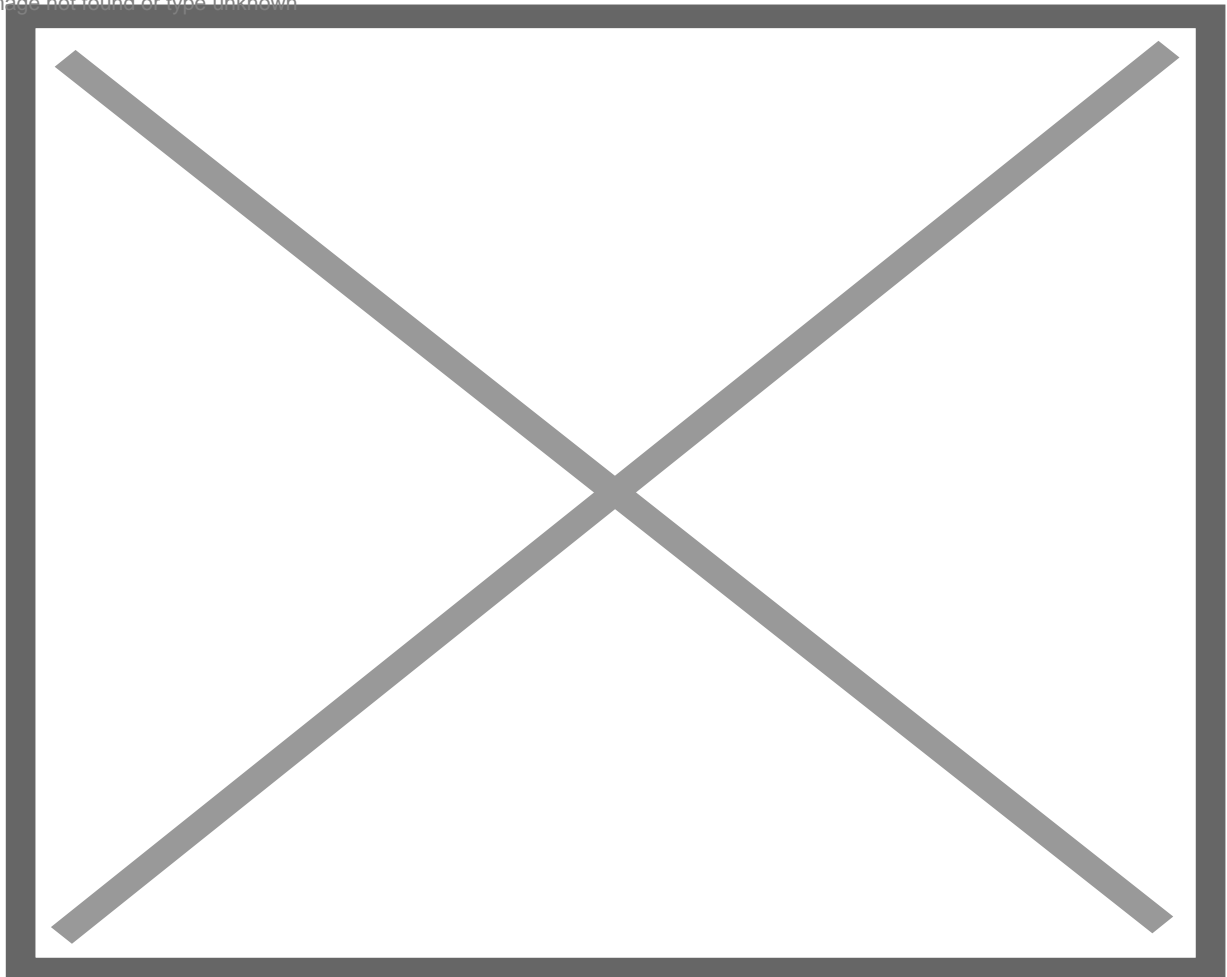
Contractor Behind Falling Ceiling Fan at Complex High School Disclosed After Pressure on Education Officials

The contractor, William Trinidad of K&J Services, installed 150 fans at both Complex and St. Croix Central High Schools. After pressure from lawmakers, education officials disclosed his identity after student injury caused by a faulty fan installation

Education / **Published On September 09, 2024 06:18 PM /**

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Ceiling fan installed at the St. Croix Educational Complex.

“Who is responsible for the installation of the fans at Complex?” That question came approximately three hours into Monday’s hearing of the Senate Committee on Education and Workforce Development. Asked by Senator Franklin Johnson, the question took the officials from the Department of Education several attempts before it was answered.

“The set [of fans] for Complex, that was an individual contractor – his expertise is being questioned,” responded Yauncey Milligan, VIDE’s Director of Maintenance on St. Croix. Mr. Milligan indicated that the fans that were installed by this contractor earlier this year were taken down following last week’s student injury. “We looked over them [to] make sure that he did everything he was supposed to do – apparently he did not,” Mr. Milligan disclosed. The yet-to-be-named contractor also installed fans at Central High, the maintenance director said, and those were set to be removed on Monday afternoon. No new work would be contracted from the individual until an investigation has been completed, lawmakers were told.

“What’s the name of the contractor?” Senator Johnson asked again. “I can’t do that right now, sir,” replied Mr. Milligan.

While Sen. Johnson was willing to move on to his next question, committee chair Senator Marise James was not so inclined. “I need to interject here,” she interrupted. “It’s a public contract, public funds...we need to know who the contractor is, plain and simple,” she insisted. Mr. Milligan passed the buck to Craig Benjamin, Executive Director of the Bureau of School Construction and Maintenance, who asked that he be able to identify the individual “offline.” Senator James denied his request.

“We need to stop this in the Virgin Islands,” the legislator declared. “If we’re talking about protecting our children and they’re harmed, we do not protect the perpetrators.”

Upon being made aware that Department of Education Procurement Director Khadila Joseph was present in the gallery, Senator Marise James asked that she come forward to provide the information that was being requested. After a short recess, Ms. Joseph was sworn in, and disclosed that the contractor who installed approximately 150 fans at the St. Croix Educational Complex and St. Croix Central High School is William Trinidad, who does business as K&J Services.?

“Thank you very much, and I appreciate your courage,” Senator James said, before releasing Ms. Joseph. “At the end of the day, if we say we’re public servants, we have to restore the public’s trust in us, and that means being honest and telling the truth.”

Later in the hearing, Sen. Johnson sought to confirm a detail about the fans that had been relayed to him by a member of the public. Mr. Milligan confirmed that the heavy industrial fans were indeed attached to the original connection points in the ceiling, and that some had begun wobbling as they spun soon after the installation had taken place.?

It is currently unclear whether or when the Department plans to release the results of their investigation to the public.