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Bureau of School Construction Executive Director is an “Illegal Hire,” Says Lawmaker

Craig Benjamin, appointed to oversee school construction, admits he is not a licensed architect or engineer, sparking concerns over compliance with Act 8717

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Bureau of School Construction and Maintenance Director Craig Benjamin, during a Senate hearing on Monday, Aug. 9, 2024. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

An apparent discrepancy between the qualifications listed for the director of the Bureau of School Construction and Maintenance, and the requirements listed in the vacancy may have led to the selection of an unsuitable candidate for the position.

On July 1 2024, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. presented [Craig Benjamin](#), a native Virgin Islander who had built a “distinguished career in school construction” as the executive director of the bureau. His appointment followed what Mr. Bryan called a “very painstaking search.” However, when Mr. Benjamin appeared before the Legislature for the first time on Monday, lawmakers realized that he did not meet the requirements enshrined in statute.?

[Act 8717](#) makes provisions for the appointment of an executive director to manage the bureau and oversee the successful implementation of relevant responsibilities. It requires, in part, that the individual be either a licensed engineer or architect in the U.S. Virgin Islands. During Monday’s meeting of the Committee on Education and Workforce Development, Mr. Benjamin admitted that he possessed neither certification.

Senator Diane Capehart was the first lawmaker to question his qualifications. When individuals are nominated to serve in various roles, their appointment would be approved by the Committee on Jules and Judiciary which Ms. Capehart chairs. “You didn’t come through the Legislature... We didn’t get to ask about your qualifications,” she told Mr. Benjamin.

Though the executive director apprised lawmakers of his two decades of experience “working as a construction and project manager under school constructions in the state of Maryland,” he admitted that his degree was not in engineering. However, he has “worked in the engineering field for the past 30-odd years... I know most of the codes,” Mr. Benjamin shared.?

“I did not complete my engineering degree. I studied architecture and engineering. However, I took the alternate route,” he clarified after Senator Capehart probed further. Though not overtly stated, Mr. Benjamin alluded to a formal qualification in construction management.

Senator Samuel Carrion was next to press Mr. Benjamin, lamenting that he possessed neither license as required by law. “That’s the problem that we have. We move legislation, and this administration decides what to implement, what to execute, when to do it, and when not to do it. It starts from the top down,” Mr. Carrion argued.

Mr. Benjamin, however, informed lawmakers that the requirements listed under Act 8717 and those detailed on the Government of the Virgin Islands’ website at the time of his application differed. Section 1, Paragraph 102 of Act 8717 states that the bureau’s executive director must be a licensed architect or engineer with seven or more years of experience in construction capital, project management or maintenance management. The vacancy notice that prompted him to apply, on the other hand, called for a bachelor’s degree in engineering, architectural design, or construction technology with four years of relevant experience or “completion of vocational level courses in building trades related fields, supplemented by eight years of supervisory experience in construction or related field.”

“The person who put it together is the person who should have read the law and applied it,” observed Senator Marise James. She had previously lamented the absence of fundamental reading skills among adults.

“You’re kind of an illegal hire based on the law,” added Senator Franklin Johnson. He decided against casting fault on Mr. Benjamin who simply “applied for what [he] saw.” However, his seemingly ultra vires presence as the head of the bureau posed a quandary for lawmakers. Sen. Johnson was not sure what the next steps should be, as the Legislature does not have the power to remove Mr. Benjamin from the position. “They just circumvent what the lawmakers put in place and send out wrong information,” he said, expressing displeasure with the administrative branch.?

Mr. Benjamin has worked as the bureau's executive director since June 17th, 2024 and is expected to continue with his responsibilities to rehabilitate the USVI's deteriorating school infrastructure.

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