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GERS Board Debates Bill to Elect Active Government Employees to Trustees

Draft legislation seeks to bring parity by allowing active employees to elect board members, raising concerns about union representation

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GERS headquarters on St. Croix. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM

During their regular monthly meeting last week, members of the Government Employees' Retirement System Board of Trustees discussed draft legislation meant to change the way board members are selected.?

Bill 35-0307, introduced by Senator Milton Potter, makes provisions for two active government employees to be elected to the GERS board, one from each district. According to GERS chair Dwane Callwood, the legislation also “establishes a mandate that all seven voting members of the

Board of Trustees meet the same requirements with respect to education and work experience.”?

“The retirees get to elect their representatives,” Mr. Callwood explained. The measure, therefore, is “just to bring some parity to the active government employees.”

Some board members were uneasy with the change. Andre Dorsey felt uncomfortable with bypassing the Central Labor Council and leaving ascension to the board open to any level of government employee. He said that as written, the draft bill would allow high-level employees to be elected. Using the chief of staff in the Office of the Governor as an example, Mr. Dorsey offered that, “I don’t feel that’s fair to the general population of the union employees.” He suggested that “someone probably needs to give [Senator Potter] a call, give him some direction on that.”?

The matter should be properly put to the Central Labor Council for consideration, not in a general GERS board meeting, Mr. Dorsey opined. “To bring it this way, I think he, Senator Potter is attacking the unionized employees. And I think...when they hear this tape, they should think about that going forward.”

Mr. Callwood noted that “all pieces of legislation that affect the GERS are normally sent to the GERS for the board to take a position. That’s all this is.”

Nevertheless, Mr. Dorsey insisted that the draft legislation was deeply flawed, recommending instead that the board be expanded to include additional seats for unclassified employees, leaving the Central Labor Council’s ability to appoint the members it selects unchanged. “I think that’s a talk the Central Labor Council probably needs to have with the senator, because I think that’s an infringement on those employees,” he reiterated.

Despite Mr. Dorsey’s opposition, the three other board members present at the meeting, when polled, indicated their support of the measure, which would place the two board seats occupied by active government employees up for direct election by the thousands of union members in the public service.