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Eulalie Rivera Break-In an “Inside Job,” Says Senator Kurt Violet

Following the theft of critical kitchen equipment, Senator Kurt Violet urges a review of school personnel, suspecting an inside job. The missing items threaten to delay renovations and disrupt meal services for 630 students.

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The Eulalie Rivera K-8 School By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

Senator Kurt Violet has called for a thorough review of personnel working in schools following the recent theft of critical kitchen equipment from the Eulalie Rivera K-8 School, which is currently under renovation.

"The Department needs to look at everyone working in these schools because the community didn't know that hoods are coming in this Saturday," Mr. Violet stated, highlighting concerns about security and oversight in school facilities.

As chair of the 36th Legislature's Committee on Education and Workforce Development, Violet was responding to Education Commissioner Dionne Wells-Hedrington's frustration over the theft, which has further delayed the school's long-overdue renovations.

"It is disheartening that every time this department makes a good effort to move things forward, we get pushed back," said Dr. Wells-Hedrington during a meeting of the Senate committee on Wednesday. "We finally have contractors in place. Work is being done. We were waiting for the last set of equipment to arrive. Equipment arrives on Saturday, we experience theft on Sunday," she lamented. Contractors, lawmakers learned, were working in the kitchen until 8 p.m. Sunday night. By 7 a.m. Monday, the equipment had vanished.

"Nobody could tell me that somebody doesn't know about that," Ms. Wells-Hedrington maintained. The theft has left her bewildered and frustrated. "You're not hurting the Department of Education. You're hurting the children of these Virgin Islands. It is disheartening, and somebody needs to step up because this is unacceptable," she declared.

There are 630 students enrolled at the Eulalie Rivera K-8 School, whose meals continue to be delivered from off-site due to the incomplete kitchen. "We need our equipment back. I need that kitchen to be finished so that our children can have hot food," the commissioner said, asserting that the incident requires a public response. "We like to hold the department accountable. Well, today, I'm holding the community accountable. If you know something, say something."

However, Senator Violet advised VIDE that they should perhaps look inwards first. "We're having a lot of these types of incidents that clearly speak to it being inside jobs," stated Mr. Violet. "At some point, we got to hold everybody responsible."

"That person had to know that Monday was a non-instructional day," commented VIDE's superintendent of schools for St. Croix, Carla Bastien-Knight. Further inquiries from the lawmaker revealed that no doors, windows, or gates were broken in the course of the theft. However, the compound's backyard is relatively unsecured. A project to install cameras on the compound was [derailed following the Mon Ethos scandal](#), and VIDE has not yet secured a new vendor.

These facts further solidified Mr. Violet's assessment. "It takes either a forklift or six to eight men to pick one of those stoves up," he offered. He was not convinced that the equipment could be easily removed from the premises during a simple break-in. "Somebody had to see a truck. There's more than one person that was involved in that incident," he maintained. The theft, said Mr. Violet, is "inconsiderate to the children of the Virgin Islands." He predicts that such actions could set the renovation back "for next year."

"I do concur that it definitely has to be someone that knew that we were doing construction, what was in there and what arrived," Ms. Wells-Hedrington said. "It's still disheartening for me that people think it's okay to steal from schools and steal from our children."

Both VIDE and Senator Violet issued a public appeal. "The best thing you could do is drop that someplace and call and tell us to pick it up," the senator warned. "Before you get arrested, you need to return the equipment, or claim that you have found it, or do whatever possible to make sure that equipment is returned to the Department of Education."

