

Vialet Criticizes Monetary Payments to Student Employees in JAG Program; Says Financial Incentives Don't Foster Long-Term Motivation

Vialet criticized the \$10.50 per hour stipend for JAG-VI students, arguing that financial incentives may not build lasting motivation. He warned that relying on extrinsic rewards could discourage students from continuing once payments end.

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Senator Kurt Vialet during a recent committee hearing. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

Senator Kurt Vialet, chair of the Committee on Education and Workforce Development, has criticised the Department of Labor for “offering extrinsic motivation” to students who participate in the Jobs for American Graduates (JAG) program. He made the comment after learning that

students who participate in the program earn a stipend of \$10.50 per hour for up to 120 hours of work.

As members of the Committee on Education and Workforce Development were reminded on Friday, the JAG program provides on-the-job training to high school seniors across the Virgin Islands. “This year, the JAG-VI program extended its reach to include 9th and 10th graders, resulting in an 81% increase in enrollment, bringing the total to 329 students,” testified Labor Commissioner Gary Malloy. According to Mr. Malloy, VIDOL has “upheld our dedication to the JAG-VI program by placing 265 12th graders on per diems.” The 10-week program began in January, with students placed in both the private and public sectors.

“I understand the concept, but I seriously have an issue in trying to teach students a particular trade or skill and actually paying them a wage,” remarked Senator Vialet. He noted that students who participate in other on-the-job training programs do not receive a stipend, but simply a grade to be included in their school report. He wondered if the \$10.50 hourly stipend is “an incentive to join JAG.”

“We're able to do JAG because we had the direct funding coming from the Casino [Control] Commission that was directly tied to legislation,” explained Mr. Malloy. Per VIDOL, JAG is offered to students who face “barriers to completing high school” – a requirement that is not limited to academic challenges. This is not the only internship program that is funded; Mr. Molloy noted that “we're also taking care of the NAF Academy as well...it's not only JAG, but it also is based on the funding availability.” Because JAG is directly funded, the ability to offer stipends is consistent.

Still, Senator Vialet – a former educator – maintained his stance. “Extrinsic motivation don't go far. Intrinsic [motivation], when you want to accomplish something, goes very, very far,” he advised Mr. Malloy. “When you continuously reward, and then you pull that reward, and they need to continue further, they [don't] because the reward is no longer there.”