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## CTE Board Requests \$689K Budget Amid Funding Gaps, Scholarship Cuts, and Staffing Strains

Facing reduced funds, unfilled vacancies, and scholarship dollars cut from its core budget, the CTE Board asked lawmakers to restore semi-autonomy, approve \$600K for a workforce fund, and prioritize hiring a grant writer to unlock federal support.

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The V.I. Legislature in May, 2015. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM.

The V.I. Board of Career and Technical Education, grappling with “heightened, challenging financial situations” according to its chair Joann Murphy, has asked the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance to approve its FY2026 [budget request of \\$689,681](#).

The request includes an allocation of \$289,667 for personnel services and \$140,371 in fringe benefits, considered “core funding” by Ms. Murphy. Approximately \$55,000 from the total budget request has been earmarked for the Albert Ragster and James A. Petersen Scholarships, a circumstance with which [the Board is not pleased](#). According to Ms. Murphy, it is a “sudden and problematic shift historically.” Previously managed by the Department of Education, funding for the scholarships “should have been added to the regular VIBCTE budget,” Ms. Murphy argued. Instead, the monies are “now being deducted from the regular VIBCTE general budget.”

“That’s something that obviously we need to address,” agreed committee chair Senator Novelle Francis.

But that’s not the CTE Board’s only qualm. Ms. Murphy described a reduction of “over 8%” in its operating budget as “deeply concerning.” Additionally, the Board is managing over \$45,000 in outstanding vendor obligations which the chair testified is due to “delays and restrictions resulting from the centralized ERP system.” The system, she later said, “hinders timely responses to emergencies even when funds are available.” CTE Executive Director Anton Döös concurred. He referenced monthly letters from the Department of Finance indicating the availability of funds. “It’s kind of like Monopoly money. It’s on paper, but not in my hands.”

For Ms. Murphy, “the Board’s current budget appropriations provides neither the flexibility nor the responsiveness required to fulfill our statutory obligations.” She has asked the Legislature to consider restoring VIBCTE’s semi-autonomous status, “accompanied by a system of quarterly cash allotments.” She also complained that the board is without “direct access to, or oversight of, the federal CTE funding, and the local financing appears to be non-existent.”

VIBCTE’s chair has also asked the Legislature to consider funding the “Ms. Lena Schulterbrandt CTE Fund” to the tune of \$600,000, which would ease the “limitations of [the] current financial set-up.” The fund would allow the board, for one, to hire journeymen or part-time instructors who are in high demand but low supply.

As a solution to VIBCTE’s financial woes, Senator Kurt Vialet suggested requesting an increase in their existing imprest fund. He stopped short, however, of greenlighting the Board’s \$600,000 request. “The board is a regulatory body. The board can’t become the school...If there’s a need to give the school more money, then we go that route,” he stated. He reminded the board’s representatives that “the Department of Education is the arm that hires teachers.”

Senator Angel Bolques Jr., meanwhile, was worried about the existing program grants manager vacancy within the board. The absence of a grant writer is hindering VIBCTE from accessing federal grants, Mr. Döös admitted. “I found out the hard way that a grant writer is expensive,” he told Mr. Bolques. Per Mr. Döös, “we have not advertised the position.” A vacancy notice was last issued “two years ago” and since then, a former board member “has kind of acted as our grant writer.”

Erroneously believing that grant writers were paid a commission based on each grant written, Mr. Döös said he was “a little bit shocked” during the last stab at hiring. “The last one I talked to, I think was \$134,000 she wanted.”

By contrast, the CTE Board only has \$55,000 available as an annual salary for that position. “It’s going to be difficult to attract someone at that salary rate,” Senator Bolques stated. He, nonetheless urged Mr. Döös to try to fill the position at the earliest. “He or she might be able to help with some of those operational challenges you’re experiencing.” Senator Marise James, too, “wholeheartedly” agreed with the need for a grant writer.

“In the long run, especially looking at what the federal government is doing, we have to revisit the idea,” Mr. Döös told Senator Carla Joseph when she made a similar inquiry as Bolques. Like the at-large senator, she recommended bringing a grant writer on board expeditiously “so you can manage your own money...I believe that would be more of a way to solve some of your troubles.”

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