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## **Bureau of No Construction: Lawmakers Blast Agency for Inaction on School Projects and Lack of Clear Maintenance Plans**

**With less than 60 days until public schools reopen, senators expressed outrage over the Bureau of School Construction and Maintenance's vague maintenance plans, lack of authority over major projects, and unclear use of millions in funding.**

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**Bureau of School Construction and Maintenance Director Craig Benjamin, during a Senate hearing on Tues. June 17, 2025. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE.**

Though formed to oversee the construction and maintenance of the territory's public schools, the Bureau of School Construction and Maintenance is apparently unaware of key information

relating to the rebuilding of several hurricane-damaged schools.

When the bureau's leadership appeared before the Committee on Education and Workforce Development on Tuesday, Executive Director Craig Benjamin could not supply committee chair Senator Kurt Vialet with start dates for work on the Central and Charlotte Amalie High Schools.

"That's going to be handled by Education and ODR," Mr. Benjamin stated. The bureau, he said, won't get involved until "the schools are turned over to us."

Senator Vialet was floored. "We fund a whole entity for millions of dollars, and now they're outside. They haven't turned over the school construction," he outlined. "We set up bureaucracies, and then stuff don't change. So how can you set up a totally separate unit and you don't transfer the full responsibility?"

He reminded Mr. Benjamin that the bureau is "supposed to be intimately involved in school construction." Instead, the executive director shared that the bureau merely participates in "progress meetings." Vialet would later quip that the bureau should only be referred to as one for school maintenance. "The whole way that everything is structured ain't going according to the bill."

The bureau's position outside of the decision-making process was not the only matter that frustrated lawmakers on Tuesday. The purpose of the hearing was to receive an update on summer maintenance efforts, with public schools reopening in less than 60 days. However, multiple lawmakers found answers to their questions unclear and uninformed. Inquiries focused on the status of repairs, inclusive of air conditioning fixes, mold remediation, buffing, painting, and the replacement of ceiling tiles.

"How are these projects being prioritized right now, especially with you talking about jeopardy of certain funding?" Senator Kenneth Gittens wondered. He was displeased that the bureau could not read out a priority list right there and then, nor could Mr. Benjamin provide a maintenance schedule to the Legislature during the meeting. He promised to "get that information to you after."

"You guys need to get specific answers together because the community waiting to hear answers," said Sen. Vialet, also exasperated. "You really seem derailed by the questions. You really seem shaken," observed Senator Dwayne DeGraff.

"It's very frustrating sitting here looking at seven people making upwards of \$700,000 and we can't get direct answers," added Gittens. That remark followed a line of questioning on mold remediation in modular units that did not initially produce the explanation the lawmaker was after.

The bureau, [created through a bill](#) sponsored by former senator Donna Frett-Gregory, was also on the receiving end of legislative beratement following discussion on security cameras for school campuses. Gittens wanted to know if the bureau will be "responsible for the installation of these cameras."

"No, I won't be. The Department of Education just simply asked us to pay for them. We're going to fund it," Mr. Benjamin replied. Mr. Gittens repeated his question. Mr. Benjamin speculated that it may be the "new Bureau of School Security that's going to be formed." The bill creating that bureau, however, was held in committee hours after Tuesday's update hearing.

Mr. Benjamin would later tell Violet that the Department of Education's head of security would presumably supervise the installation. Violet was confused. "That's ridiculous. You're giving out money that you don't have for school maintenance, for the installation of cameras... You're taking a whole million dollars from your budget that you don't have – projects that we need to fund – to give to education, to install cameras?"

"Y'all get this thing together please," Gittens urged. "Because this is a level of bureaucracy that we continue to talk about... be prepared and fully transparent so that this body can assist you with your mandate."

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