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Senate Advances Bill Letting Government Retirees Work at UVI Without Losing GERS Annuities

Sen. Carla Joseph's Bill would allow retirees to join UVI under a separate plan while keeping pensions. UVI and GERS leaders say the measure secures financial stability for staff, aids recruitment, and helps fill critical roles in medical and tech fields.

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Sen. Carla Joseph's bill, approved in committee, would let government retirees work at UVI without losing their GERS annuities, aiming to boost recruitment and faculty retention. By. THE VIRGIN ISLANDS LEGISLATURE.

If successfully passed into law, a measure introduced by Senator Carla Joseph on Monday is expected to benefit the University of the Virgin Islands by making it easier to attract highly

qualified and experienced faculty members.

Bill 36-0061, introduced in the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection, would allow government retirees to be employed by UVI and receive a salary from the university without losing their GERS annuity. The bill specifies, however, that this provision will only be applicable if the retiree enrolls in a different retirement plan.

“This legislation is a win-win for our community,” Senator Joseph said. “It allows experienced retirees to reenter government service at the University of the Virgin Islands without forfeiting their hard-earned retirement benefits, ensuring their financial security.” The lawmaker anticipates that the measure would help UVI “fulfill its mission of excellence in education and service to the Virgin Islands.”

The University of the Virgin Islands manages the Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association (TIAA), a scheme open to teachers, administrative faculty and other personnel. According to testimony from Angel Dawson, the administrator of the GERS, a legislative “carve out” already exists to allow GERS retirees to enroll in TIAA if employed by the University. Therefore, he stated “no opposition” to Bill 36-0061.

UVI President Dr. Safiya George, was also grateful for the introduction of the legislation. Historically, GERS retirees who then returned to work at the University were unable to collect their annuity. It’s something that George argued could cause “unnecessary financial strain.” She welcomed Sen. Joseph's amendment to existing laws, citing the potential for affected individuals to now “plan their finances, benefit from their annuity for the next four years, and gives them time to plan accordingly.” There are three current UVI employees who will benefit should Sen. Joseph's bill become law.

George anticipates that enacting Bill 36-0061 will help “secure the financial future of employees, reduce turnover and improve recruitment efforts for future staff and faculty.”

Bill 36-0061 was an easy ask for lawmakers. “Because the GERS is comfortable with this, I'm comfortable with it,” stated Senator Hubert Frederick. Despite not being on the committee and thus unable to vote, Senator Marvin Blyden also spoke up in support of the measure. “It's intent is necessary,” he said.

George agreed, explaining that “we often have difficulty in getting very experienced folks for certain faculty positions, for example.” She believes the amendment will “help us broaden the pool and give our students an opportunity to benefit from retirees' wealth of wisdom and expertise.”

Sen. Joseph, the bill’s sponsor, anticipates that UVI will be able to better attract instructors and executive leadership in medical education departments and centers, as well as in robotics technology. UVI is in “dire need” of these technical positions, including grant writers, to “stay ahead of the game and truly educate our workforce,” she told colleagues.

Bill 36-0061 received affirmative votes from the entire committee and will next be considered in the Committee on Rules and Judiciary.