

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## Rodents and Power Outages Undermine VIDE Technology as Officials Cite WAPA Failures and Aging Infrastructure

**Education officials told lawmakers that recurring WAPA outages, outdated equipment, and rat infestations in server rooms have damaged critical systems, disrupted internet connectivity, and left VIDE dependent on short-term fixes and federal funding hopes**

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An aerial view of the SCEC campus, showing multiple school buildings and surrounding grounds where education officials said critical technology infrastructure has been damaged by power outages and rodent infestations. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM.

An unlikely duo is presenting massive challenges to the technological infrastructure the V.I. Department of Education needs to provide an effective learning environment: rodents, and the Water and Power Authority.

When Education Commissioner Dionne Wells-Hedrington appeared before the Committee on Education and Workforce Development on Thursday, she testified that the department continues to face ongoing network and internet connectivity challenges. It has primarily impacted schools on St. Thomas, where VIDE's primary network operations center is based, but St. Croix hasn't been spared either.

While these challenges are "largely due to aging infrastructure, outdated equipment, and recurring systems failures across both districts," Commissioner Wells-Hedrington noted that a "major contributing factor has been the frequency of territory-wide power outages." These faults have "damaged critical technology equipment, particularly battery backup systems needed to protect and maintain operations during power interruptions."

VIDE has implemented "short-term stabilization measures," including critical central server upgrades. However, given the "continued instability of the school's power grid and the ongoing challenges associated with WAPA service interruptions," the upgrades are not sustainable.

VIDE, Wells-Hedrington said, is exploring federal funding opportunities through the E-Rate program, formally known as the Schools and Libraries Universal Service Support Program. Securing that funding would allow VIDE to replace outdated equipment, install modern battery backup systems, and upgrade internal network infrastructure.

Once funding is secured, VIDE intends to outsource those services to "ensure a timely, efficient, and professional implementation." These technological investments will "enhance digital learning" among a host of other anticipated benefits.

However, while VIDE works on E-Rate-funded projects and identifying a funding source for a new generator, there is another gnawing problem: rats.

"The rats enjoy eating our fiber, and they have really infested our server rooms in our schools and have destroyed major, major equipment," Wells-Hedrington shared. A recent visit to the St. Croix Educational Complex, for example, revealed that "rat urine had gone into the system and destroyed the whole equipment."

While VIDE's internal IT team is taking some action, with the Bureau of School Construction and Maintenance is providing more physical solutions.

According to BCSM director Craig Benjamin, a service contract is in place with exterminators. "They address the issues by going out and placing traps for these rodents," he explained to a concerned Senator Dwayne DeGraff. The Bureau will also "seal off the areas to create a situation where they can't get in." Mr. Benjamin is aware that rats have been "chewing through different components of the buildings" and BSCM intends to "do our best to control that."

Sealing the building includes the use of expandable foam and wire mesh "so that when they bite into it, it would affect their digestive system and basically kill them off," Mr. Benjamin explained.

Solutions for the problems caused by WAPA, however, could not be offered by either department.

“Every time we have a WAPA interruption, it knocks out the general server area,” Ms. Wells-Hegrington lamented.

Though VIDE continues to employ creative measures within the constraints of its outdated equipment, the “major issue is actually the power outages,” James Richardson, acting IT director, reiterated.

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