

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Lawmakers Urge Labor Department to Reach ‘Those on the Blocks’ as Commissioner Cites Resistance and Barriers

Lawmakers urged VIDOL to better engage residents outside the workforce, but Commissioner Gary Molloy said many remain uninterested and face complex barriers, including mental health issues, requiring coordination beyond labor services.

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Nelcia Charlemagne **February 06, 2026**



Lawmakers have urged the V.I. Department of Labor (VIDOL) to expand outreach to benefit “those on the blocks” in the Virgin Islands.

The request, made to VIDOL Commissioner Gary Molloy, first came from Senator Marvin Blyden during Thursday's meeting of the Committee on Education and Workforce Development.

He informed Sen. Blyden that the department had "done our outreach" but "those on the corners, on the blocks, they're not interested in what we have to offer in most cases." According to Mr. Molloy, the situation is exacerbated by "other extenuating circumstances that might not make them as employable right away."

He described some of the barriers as "real intense" and "go beyond our scope of services." That includes mental health conditions, as an example. Addressing those circumstances requires collaboration with other agencies, something that Mr. Molloy says VIDOL is trying to coordinate.

"I'll tell you, point blank, again, that's a very difficult population because they're more at risk than we are giving them credit for," he stated.

Senator Avery Lewis called for an inclusive approach to skills training and job placement.

"It's a challenge, nonetheless we still go out there and we still do our best to reach them," added assistant commissioner and [former Senator Jean Forde](#). "It's part of our duty also to try and reach these individuals, so we haven't given up, but it's quite a challenge in many cases."

For Senator Kurt Violet, the committee's chair, the request is not an insurmountable task. "It's a challenge, but it's a challenge that we have to step up to because if we don't take care of the population, then crime increase," he warned.

"It's better to take care of them by trying to provide some training than taking care of them in Golden Grove or John A. Bell," Sen. Violet declared. "I know it's a hard population, but we got to continue to try." He encouraged VIDOL to leverage potential opportunities with infrastructural development in the territory's housing communities. "Try to get those individuals that are living there to actually try to learn a trade or just become a laborer," he suggested. Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett [made a similar argument days ago](#).

Senator Milton Potter, meanwhile, suggested "developing a specialized team" with the "experience and the street credibility" that could sustain the push toward "recruiting or identifying or bringing in these young men who really we need to impact."

Responding to his recommendation, Commissioner Molloy indicated that "the structure is already there. The expertise is already there." The challenge lies in "making the results that we're looking for." He reminded lawmakers of the "other barriers that need to be addressed," noting that VIDOL "can't move forward with placement until some of those other barriers are addressed, and we don't control those timelines."

In the spirit of a solutions-based discussion, Sen. Violet encouraged dialogue between VIDOL and the Law Enforcement Planning Commissions (LEPC), which has a "substantial budget that is not being utilized, and the monies are going back."

“There’s some opportunities in which you can expand your programs because they’re looking for venues to be able to spend those monies,” Mr. Violet explained.

It’s something that VIDOL will have to take into consideration as a possible option for bridging that gap.

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