

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Dozens Of V.I. Teachers Moving To U.S., Retirees Filling Positions

VIC News / **Published On September 23, 2014 09:06 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert **September 23, 2014**



The Department of Education is having a hard time retaining teachers for the 2014-2015 school year, Education Commissioner Donna Frett-Gregory made known at a Senate hearing on Monday.

The difficulty of keeping teachers in local schools has been attributed to many factors, according to Frett-Gregory, including better salary packages elsewhere and the high crime rate in the community. In light of this, the Department's division of human resources have presented a "comprehensive application and associated fees" to the U.S. Department of State "to allow us to continue hiring international professionals to fill vacancies we are unable to fill with local and mainland recruits," Frett-Gregory said. She

added that the Department of Education was awaiting review of the application by the federal agency before moving forward.

In her testimony, Frett-Gregory pointed out the Dept. of Education continues to see last-minute resignations. She also revealed the number of teachers who have resigned, or plan on doing so.

"We continue to be plagued with the continuous last-minute submissions of notification from employees advising of the intent to leave," Frett-Gregory said. "Since our last report, 29 employees, territorially, have separated prior to the opening of the school year 2014-2015. An additional 10 employees have also submitted notifications, advising of their intent to separate on September 30, 2014."

Adding to the pressures of insufficient teaching staff, more and more teachers are asking for sick leave, Frett-Gregory said, and some teachers have not reported to work since the school year began on Sept. 2.

"To date, a significant number of employees are currently out on extended sick leave, and leave requests are coming in daily," she explained. "It is imperative to know that the aforementioned number of vacancies do not include five secondary teachers, territory-wide, who have not reported to duty since the opening of the school year."

Despite its challenges, Frett-Gregory said the Department of Education continues to do its best to ensure the territory's students "receive a quality education," and have employed retired teachers to fill the vacancies while it awaits a decision from the State Department on the hiring of international professionals.

"To address our teaching challenges, the substitute pool continues to be utilized," she said. "We have a number of retired teachers who have agreed to serve as substitute teachers. I also want to publicly thank all of our substitute teachers for responding to the call, and ensuring that our students continue to receive a quality education despite our personnel challenges."