

The Virgin Islands Consortium

School Lunch Workers To Become Full-Time Employees This August, Violet Says

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ST. CROIX -- Sen. Kurt Violet has said that school lunch workers who have been receiving part-time salaries because they are limited to work only 6.5 hours a day, will become full-time employees in the incoming school year -- this August.

Violet shared the news with *VI Consortium* via a phone interview following a meeting between Governor Kenneth Mapp and his senior cabinet members, senators of the 31st Legislature and Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett on Monday at Government House in Christiansted.

The former educator said he raised the topic for discussion during the meeting, and governor Mapp not only agreed, but said he "will be moving, effective the next school year (August, 2015), to make sure that those employees become full-time members of the government of the Virgin Islands," Vialet said.

The freshman senator has been championing the school lunch workers' cause upon being sworn into office in January, and later that month issued a press release expressing frustration with the current situation.

Vialet outlined a number of reasons why cafeteria workers, who clock 6.5 hours a day at minimum wage, and are denied the 1.5 hours that would qualify them as full-time employees, should receive salaried pay. Among them:

- being "forced to go without pay during the summer and Christmas vacations"
- Serving meals to more than 2,000 students per day
- Navigating extreme temperatures in the kitchen, as well as managing kitchen activities

Cafeteria workers are currently Per Diem employees.

In light of the reasons listed, Vialet in January called upon Dept. of Education Commissioner-designee Sharon McCollum, PhD and Governor Kenneth Mapp "to designate these per diem/part-time employees as full-time employees who receive health insurance and retirement benefits."

Vialet, the top vote-getter in the 2014 General Election, added, "These employees need 1.5 [more] hours per day to be considered full-time employees. Furthermore, GERS can definitely benefit from additional contributing members."

Like other DOE employees who may require medical attention, Vialet said cafeteria workers are also "prone to injury [and] thus are in dire need of health insurance."

In concluding his call for fair treatment for the employees, Vialet said the cafeteria worker's position is reimbursed by the federal government, so DOE should not experience a significant impact on its budget.

"Please put an end to this injustice," he said in January.

However, the latest developments have allayed Vialet's concerns on the matter, telling *VI Consortium* that he's "very happy", and added that the governor and his team will soon be discussing methods through which to implement the change and set qualification criteria.