

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Daytime Curfew Law For Students, Sponsored By Violet, Moves Forward

VIC News / **Published On July 29, 2015 01:08 PM /**

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ST. CROIX -- Members of the Committee on Homeland Security, Public Safety and Justice gathered at the Frits E. Lawaetz Conference Room here to take action on four measures, including a bill sponsored by freshman Senator Kurt Violet that adds amendments to the territory's truancy laws, in an effort to keep students off the streets during school hours.

Among the testifiers were officials from the Dept. of Education and the Virgin Islands Police Department, who wholeheartedly agreed with Bill No. 31-0172, seen [here](#), and promised to relay the idea of an action plan, pitched by Violet, to DOE Commissioner Sharon McCollum, who was absent during yesterday's hearing.

Violet, a former educator, expressed his concern, [as he's done in the past](#), for the territory's educational structure and its inevitable failure if corrective measures are not taken to quell its deterioration. The senator spared no words while conveying his frustrations.

The measure "seeks to deal with a problem that I have noticed in the Virgin Islands for quite a while, where it is common practice to see children on the streets of the Virgin Islands, during school hours, riding bikes, in stores, hanging out, and there's no apparent penalty," Violet said. "And all studies have showed that attendance is directly tied to a student's ability to perform well academically."

The bill, in its amended form, singled out the VIPD as the agency to carryout enforcement, however Police Commissioner Delroy Richards, Sr., who also supports the measure, called for another amendment that would include all peace officers in the territory, so as to be more effective in implementing the truancy law. The amendment was later added by Senator Sammuel Sanes.

Senator Justin Harrigan, Sr., said he did not understand why the truancy program was abandoned, and noted that he's success can be attributed to its effectiveness, when authorities relayed to his mother that he wasn't attending classes.

But it was the bill's sponsor who really drove home the importance of the amended measure, which he admits is just one of the efforts that will help put education back on the right path.

Violet said he examined a chart that was included in the testimony of the education commissioner, and it revealed that between the years 2005 and 2014, 3,139 students dropped out of schools in the territory, which represents 3 percent of the overall population.

"So if we don't begin to fix these simple problems, the situation in the Virgin Islands is going to get worse," the Democrat said. Violet, who noted the fact that letters are sent home to parents when their children are absent, said, "some of the parents can't read; that's the reality. And when you send home anything that's technical to them, they're not even opening up that envelop.

"We're going to have to be creative in terms of how we confront this problem and how we're going to be able to stop it," he continued.

The daytime curfew measure saw full support and was favorably forwarded to Rules by members of the committee, chaired by Sen. Novelle Francis, including Senators Harrigan, Jean Forde, Sanes, Almando "Rocky" Liburd and Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly. The committee's Vice Chair, Kenneth Gittens was absent.

"I think what I really wanted to accomplish was to have discussions," Violet said. "Because we have a lot of issues in education and we just refuse to have a candid discussion as to how we need to move forward and we continue, sometimes, as a community, to act like the decisions that we make are not having a tremendous impact on this community.

"Students [not] going to school on a regular basis is a problem in the Virgin Islands. It's way too common for us to accept students running around the community during school time.

"I am hoping that as a result of us having this discussion that there will be a meeting between the Department of Education, the police department and Human Services because it needs to be done."

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