

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Measure To Make School Lunch Workers Full-time Government Employees Passes Senate

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ST. THOMAS -- Senator Kurt Violet has been advocating for school lunch workers ever since becoming a lawmaker. [In April](#), Violet told The Consortium that 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.

The confirmation came following a discussion Violet had with Governor Kenneth Mapp during a meeting the same month. The former educator said he raised the topic for discussion and not only did Mapp agree, the governor 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,” Violet said.

And at an all-day Senate session that went into the early hours of Thursday morning, Violet mentioned that \$1.2 million was added through an amendment to the government's Fiscal Year 2016 budget, "to make that entire school lunch program becomes whole (instead of part-time)," and "to ensure that those employees become contributing members to GERS, to be able to acquire health insurance," Violet said.

Violet called the amendment "very significant," and revealed that funding was also included in the budget for at least one maintenance worker at each of the territory's schools.

"When we conducted the [school tours](#), we saw a lot of minor items that if there was just one person assigned, it could have been fixed," he said.

The freshman senator had 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.

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

Violet, 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, Violet 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, Violet 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.