

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Sen. Francis Request viNGN Hearing To Determine Its Ability To Spur Economic Growth

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ST. CROIX -- Senator Novelle Francis, Jr. has asked Senator Janette Millin Young, Chair of the Committee on Economic Development, Agriculture and Planning to convene a hearing to learn more of the Virgin Islands' Next Generation Network's (viNGN) ability to support the territory's economic development, a press release the senator's office issued on Friday has made known. Mr. Francis, who is the vice-chair of the Committee, wrote Mrs. Millin Young on January 28 to formally express his concerns that the agency is not meeting its mandate to utilize new technology to advance community and economic development. In that letter, he requested a hearing on the subject.

A separate release also issued on Friday revealed that Mrs. Millin Young had honored Mr. Francis' request, and a meeting has been scheduled for February 10.

According to Mr. Francis, it is important to hear about the viNGN's ongoing initiatives, particularly as the territory's broadband access is a core component of attracting new business and creating a literate and skilled workforce.

"My office has received multiple complaints about viNGN's closed community computer centers and limited broadband access in our schools," he said. "Our ability to build a workforce that is technologically skilled, with ready access to internet based educational tools depends heavily on viNGN. When we market the territory as open for business, we need to take all necessary measures to ensure that our local residents are prepared to participate in the workforce."

Mr. Francis, a freshman senator, thanked Mrs. Millin Young for her speedy response to his request and action in scheduling a hearing to receive a status update of viNGN operations. "Within hours of receiving my letter, Senator Millin Young notified me that a hearing is tentatively scheduled for the afternoon of February 10," he said.

Mr. Francis has also asked for the Bureau of Information Technology to be included in the hearing, since technological interconnectivity also affects government efficiency and economic activity.