

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Home-Schooling Bill Clears First Hurdle

VIC News / **Published On October 05, 2016 12:09 PM /**

Ernice Gilbert **October 05, 2016**



ST. CROIX -- A measure seeking to untie home-schooling from the regulatory eye of the Virgin Islands Board of Education won the favor of all senators gathered at the Frits E. Lawaetz Legislative Hall here on Monday, who make up the Committee on Education and Workforce Development.

Though the measure will be amended, senators generally agreed with the measure, with the bill's sponsor, Senator Novelle Francis -- who said the bill was specifically for parents and guardians who home-school their children, and not the many learning centers throughout the territory that essentially operate as unlicensed private schools -- pointing to the growing interest in home-schooling from parents throughout the territory.

The bill, seen [here](#), says, "A parent retains full control over a home instruction of a child, including the 9 teaching and testing methods, the selection of curriculum, the instructors, and the location of 10 instruction. Neither the commissioner, the Department of Education, nor a school district may adopt regulations pertaining to home instruction," unless provided in the bill.

It adds: "A parent of a child of compulsory school attendance age shall submit by either mail, fax or hand delivery to the commissioner a notice of the intent to provide home instruction each year by September 1. If home instruction begins after the school year commences, notice must be filed not later than ten days after home instruction begins."

The V.I. B.O.E.'s pending rules has been seen as detrimental to home schools advocates, some of whom banded together in issuing an [opinion article](#) calling for senators to support Mr. Francis's measure. V.I. B.O.E.'s rules, if implemented, would mandate subjects such as math, science, social studies, language arts and reading. It would also require parents and guardians to list the number of hours and days of learning and qualifications of teachers.

Mr. Francis, who said home schools were legal in all 50 U.S. states, stressed that the measure was not a rebuke of the public school system, but rather a bill aimed at giving home-schoolers a framework through which to operate.

Kathryn Brightbill of the Coalition for Responsible Home Education, called for more regulations through her testimony, stating that they've seen many home-schooled students fall behind in basic education. She did not call for a rejection of the measure; only that it be amended to include more regulations. Ms. Brightbill suggested the measure be amended to ensure students meet with an independent monitor to ensure that the child is receiving adequate learning. She also suggested the inclusion of background checks for parents wishing to home-school their children.

V.I. B.O.E.'s Chairwoman Mary Moorehead opposed several provisions in the bill, including the timeline of notification given by home-schoolers to the D.O.E. commissioner and the removal of the board's power to issue regulations.

Home-schoolers who testified in favor of the bill resisted additional oversight, however, contending that children who are home-schooled generally outperform their public school counterparts.

According to Assistant D.O.E. Commissioner Chermaine Hobson-Johnson, D.O.E. handled 113 notices of intent to home-school in the 2015-16 school year; 76 students coming from the St. Croix district, while 37 students notices were from the St. Thomas-St. John district.

The measure now heads to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary for further vetting.