

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Francis Urges Plaskett To Speak Out Against House Bill That Could Cut School Lunch Funding

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ST. CROIX -- Senator Novelle Francis on Friday wrote to Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett, expressing his desire for her to actively speak out against a proposed legislation that could be detrimental to federal funding received for the school lunch program in the territory.

"In the letter, I brought to the delegate's attention an issue that is slowly snowballing into what can become a detrimental situation for the Virgin Islands Education Department, our public school system, its students, staff and parents," Mr. Francis said. "H.R.610 was filed in the House of Representatives in January and if it is successfully passed, it would repeal the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which has since been

renamed the “Every Student Succeed Act of 2015.”

Mr. Francis pointed out that, among other things, H.R.610 would establish an education voucher program with block grants to states. Funds would be available to have children attend private schools – opportunities that will only benefit upper middle class and wealthy families, he said. According to the senator, low-income children would not be able to take advantage of the opportunity because the voucher seldom pays the entire tuition amount, and transportation is usually not provided.

Additionally, Mr. Francis said that while conducting research, he realized that H.R.610 could have trickle-down effects on the population at the territory's public schools, as middle income parents take advantage of the program.

“This reduction would affect our school lunch participation numbers and in turn drastically reduce the federal funds that we receive for our feeding programs,” he said. “Currently, our programs feed about 11,700 students daily at a federal government reimbursed rate of just under \$4 each. These funds supply food for breakfast, lunch, snack and summer feeding programs, and supplement strapped local government funds used to pay school lunch program workers, purchase equipment and transport goods and meals.”

With [more than 30 percent of the territory's children living in poverty](#), Mr. Francis said neither the community nor the government is in a position to suffer the consequences of a loss of the \$10 million associated with the school feeding program funds. He said children who are hungry cannot concentrate on learning, and are at risk of falling further behind on the pathway to academic success.

“I asked our delegate to use her influence and relationships with members of the House to encourage those voting members to say no to H.R.610.,” he concluded.