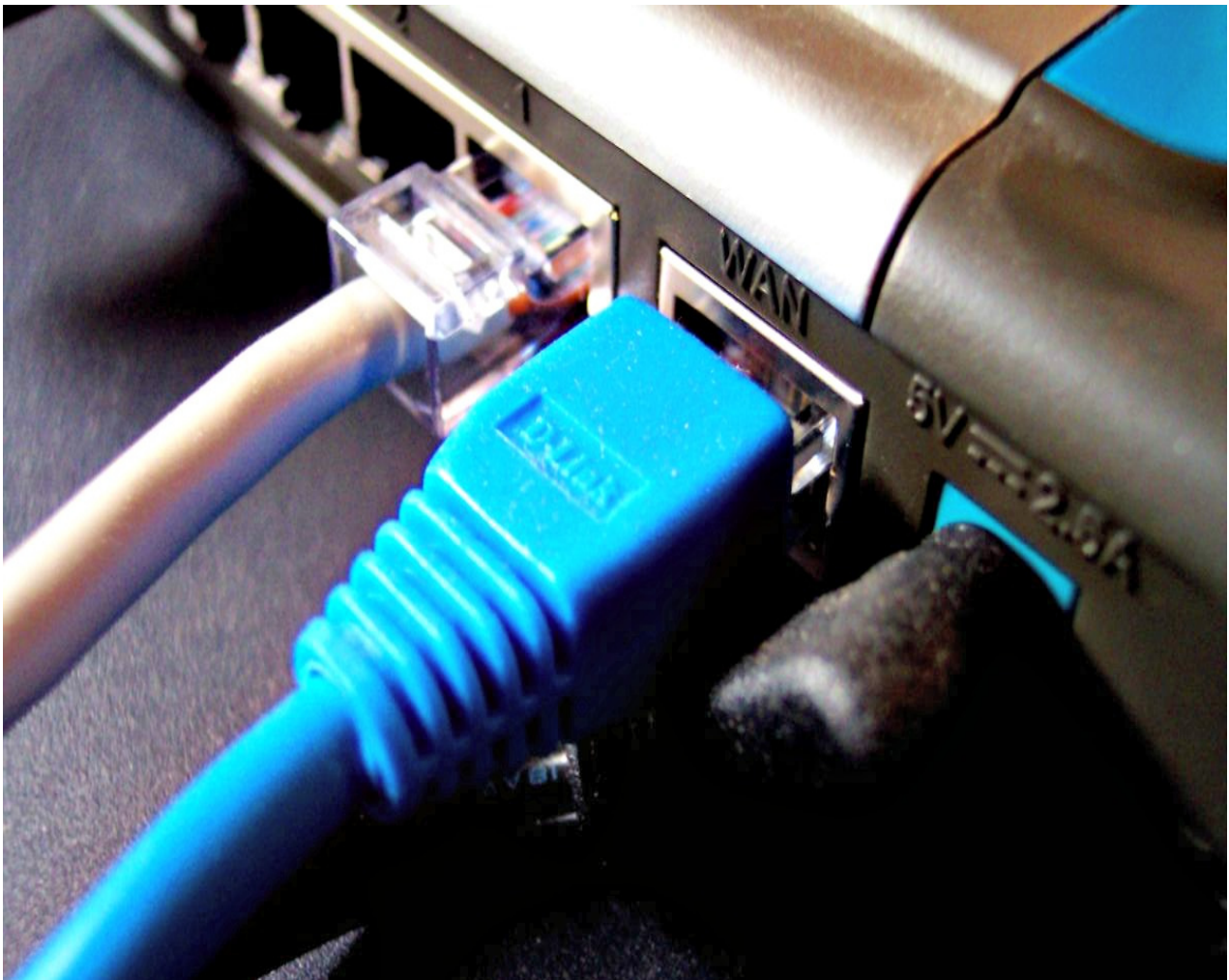


The Virgin Islands Consortium

Sen. Francis, Concerned About High School Seniors' Ability To Access Internet, Calls For Public/Private Partnership

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ST. CROIX -- Senator Novelle Francis has reached out to Virgin Islands Next Generation Network (viNGN) and internet service providers in the territory to facilitate Internet accessibility for students at local high schools, saying that greater connectivity will yield greater success for students and teachers, Mr. Francis announced this afternoon.

According to the release, on Monday, the senator wrote a letter to H. Mark McGibbon, president and CEO of viNGN, requesting assistance in securing internet hot spots for St. Croix public high schools. "I am asking that you assign priority status to this request, to

allow students, faculty and staff access to the Internet while on campus at the St. Croix Educational Complex and the St. Croix Central High School,” the letter read.

Mr. Francis said his request was borne out of concern for high school seniors who need Internet access to complete their college applications and other assignments. “As you are aware, a majority of our households do not have electricity or Internet access in the wake of Hurricane Maria. In fact, the digital divide existing in the Virgin Islands has been worsened by the storms, as more students are challenged to access reliable internet service,” Mr. Francis said. “For high school seniors, as well as their teachers and counselors, internet access is a necessity to complete college applications, upload transcripts and recommendation letters and apply for financial aid in a timely manner. The lack of internet access potentially affects our students’ ability to meet critical deadlines that are necessary for their post-high school pursuits.”

The second-term Democrat noted that he is appreciative of viNGN’s efforts to create public Wi-Fi hotspots and have certainly utilized many of these locations himself. But he believes that the students are best served by having hot spots at their schools during this critical time on their personal goals timeline.

Mr. Francis said Mr. McGibbon has since responded to his letter, noting that viNGN’s fiber optic team will be assessing the areas surrounding both campuses to determine if fiber had been installed in the areas and if the telephone poles that had been damaged by the hurricane were replanted. Mr. McGibbon also noted in his response that it is the company’s hope that fiber is present, and that viNGN would alternatively attempt to determine if Broadband VI is broadcasting a signal in the areas of the schools so that receiving antennas can be installed to internet service.

The senator said he was grateful for the company’s quick and positive response and is hopeful that they can work expeditiously with the Department of Education to assess the needs and reach an ideal solution.