The Virgin Islands Consortium

School Lunch Program Audit Unearths Rife Mismanagement, Loss Of Federal Funding

Government / **Published On February 17, 2018 11:26 AM /**

Staff February 17, 2018

The latest audit from the territory's Office of the Inspector General delved into the Virgin Islands Department of Education's (D.O.E.) School Lunch Program between 2013 to early 2015, unearthing rampant mismanagement, a drop in participation, and loss of federal funding of over $1.7 million, among a myriad of other problems.

"We found that within Education, there was a pervasive culture of non-compliance with federal regulations that govern the reimbursement of meals served in the Virgin Islands school system," read a letter addressed to Governor Kenneth Mapp and Senate President Myron Jackson. "Specifically, our audit found that: (i) federal reimbursement and entitlement food decreased during 2013 to 2015 school years; (ii) internal controls were not established to ensure that meal reimbursement claims were accurate and met federal guidelines; (iii) Education officials did not effectively maximize opportunities to obtain additional federal funds to sustain the School Lunch Program; and, (iv) Education officials did not ensure that meals offered and served complied with USDA nutrition and pattern requirements."

Notably, the audit represents years before the Mapp administration took office, except for the first half of 2015, and in multiple responses to address various areas of concern the audit highlighted, Sharon McCollum, D.O.E. commissioner, agreed with the recommendations made by the I.G. In other areas, Ms. McCollum said the I.G.'s report fell in line with initiatives already put in place by the current D.O.E. team.

In the letter, the I.G. said it attributed the conditions it found in the program to a drop in student participation, along with D.O.E. officials' failure to not implementing recommended strategies to boost student participation; not establishing policies and procedures; not addressing the problem of poorly trained employees and understaffing; turning a blind eye to obvious nonreimbursable meal claims; being placed in a position of a conflict of interest; continued non-compliance with federal regulations; and not ensuring the availability and correct serving of menu items.

"As result: (i) over the three academic school years of our audit scope, there has been a funding loss of $1.7 million dollars; (ii) over 95,000 meals were improperly claimed, with anywhere from $32,000 to $259,000 in funds being placed in jeopardy of repayment to the USDA; (iii) unnecessary pressure may be placed on the territory's local funds budgeted for the School Lunch Program; (iv) the territory lost certification that resulted in the loss of $206,000 in additional reimbursements; and, (v) students did not always receive the recommended daily nutritional supplement to aid in their academic performance and maintain good health," read the letter.

Find the full audit here, or see it below.

Read the original document