

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Dept. Of Justice Closes Investigation Into Burglary Incident At Addelita Cancryn School

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Acting Attorney General Claude E. Walker.

ST. THOMAS -- The Department of Justice has closed an investigation into a burglary incident at the Adelita Cancryn Junior High School, where \$8,000 went missing after Hurricane Irma damaged the facility, with Attorney General Claude Walker telling The Consortium on Tuesday morning that the matter was closed because of insufficient evidence.

He also told this publication that his investigation determined that there would be no action taken against Lisa Forde, the wife of Senator Jean Forde, who was suspended for 60 days by the Department of Education following the incident, which was reported to police on September 27, 2017.

"I found that the evidence is not supported by probable cause to take any action. The facts and circumstances are insufficient to cause a reasonable person to believe that a criminal offense has occurred. This matter is, at this time, closed," Mr. Walker said. He added that with two Category 5 hurricanes ravaging the U.S.V.I. and many of its schools -- including Addelita Cancryn -- it was difficult to tell who could have stolen the funds.

On February 15, The Consortium [reported](#) that Mrs. Forde was under investigation by the Department of Justice relative to missing funds at Addelita Cancryn, with the online paper quoting a "trusted, well placed" D.O.J. person as the source of the information.

Following our report, D.O.J. confirmed that an investigation had been launched, but said its policy prohibited Mr. Walker from commenting further. "Attorney General Walker can confirm that the Department of Justice is investigating a Department of Education employee in the St. Thomas-St. John District regarding missing funds. We cannot provide further information at this time, as the investigation is ongoing," Mr. Walker said.

Mr. Forde, while stating that [he would file a libel suit](#) against the online paper in response to the story, confirmed that his wife had been suspended by D.O.E. relative to \$8,000 that went missing from the school's office.

In response to Mr. Forde, VI Consortium Founder, Ernice Gilbert, said, "We stand 100 percent by our story as well as our veritable D.O.J. source that made us aware of the investigation. We believe the story falls in the realm of public service journalism, and we will continue to bring to light matters we believe are of public interest."

In February, Mr. Forde made available to The Daily News a police report filed by Officer Patrick Smith indicating that Mrs. Forde called police to report a burglary on September 27. She told police that she locked and secured the school's office building at 5:30 p.m. on September 15 — four days before Hurricane Maria, [which affected St. Croix the most on September 19](#).

According to the Daily News, citing the police report, Mrs. Forde told police she returned to the building on September 27 only to see that her office had been burglarized and the vault open, according to the report. Mrs. Forde told police that she asked one of the workmen what took place, and she said the workman told her that he had seen five young men climbing around the back window of the office building.

Officer Smith quoted Mrs. Forde as saying, "He did not think anything of it because of the severe damage of the building."

The report said suspects probably scaled the south wall of the office to enter through a broken window. The report was filed by Officer Smith on October 5, 2017, according to the local paper.

Mr. Forde told the paper he believed the suspension of his wife from the school and order to pay back the \$8,000, was retribution for a heated back and forth with Ms. McCollum at

a hearing regarding an informal agreement between Ms. McCollum and a storage company in October, according to The Daily News.

He told the paper that Ms. McCollum said she had an informal agreement with a private company to store salvaged inventory from Cost-U-Less at the Benjamin Oliver Elementary School in exchange for free cleaning supplies for all schools. Mr. Forde said he pointed out the matter to Ms. McCollum. "Dr. McCollum apparently became very irate that I pointed it out," the senator said. He said the commissioner cancelled the agreement and paid for the supplies. However, he challenged the claim, stating, according to The Daily News, "Based on the limited investigation that I have done so far, no check has been issued."

Mr. Forde went on to tell that paper that Ms. McCollum is "petty," and that she oftentimes seek to find out who told him about issues within D.O.E.

Ms. McCollum declined to provide a comment to the paper, stating, "I absolutely have no comment on that."