

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Calls Special Session To Force College Tuition Bill To Senate Floor In Light Of Apparent Stalling

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Ernice Gilbert **October 18, 2018**



Following coverage of the stalling of a free college tuition bill Governor Kenneth Mapp introduced on September 11, which was preempted by Senator Tregenza Roach who has authorship of the measure, Mr. Mapp on Thursday called the 32nd Legislature into Special Session on October 26 to consider his proposal.

“The president of the university has indicated that any further delay in the consideration of the proposed bill will hamper the university’s ability to implement this program in the Fall of 2019,” Governor Mapp wrote in his letter to Senate President Myron Jackson, according to Government House.

The governor's bill establishes what will be known as the V.I. Workforce Development Scholarship Program and offers free tuition to new, former or current students. The measure in many ways is similar to the free tuition bill introduced by Mr. Roach first in 2013. However, while Mr. Roach's bill had no funding source, Mr. Mapp's measure has, and while Mr. Roach's bill seeks students with a grade point average (GPA) of 3.0, Mr. Mapp's legislation requires a 2.0 GPA.

Senate President Myron Jackson told The Consortium Wednesday that when Mr. Mapp submitted the bill to the Senate, the same day Mr. Mapp [introduced the measure during a press conference](#), Mr. Jackson said he immediately did his part as Senate president by sending the measure to legal counsel, a normal process, he said, in moving legislation through the Senate.

But once the measure arrived to legal counsel, it was determined that Mr. Roach has authorship of the free tuition initiative. It was then up to Mr. Roach to utilize one of a few options, Mr. Jackson said. He could have allowed the governor's free tuition measure to go through (giving up authorship), he could reintroduce his measure to the respective committee for hearings, or he could have chosen to merge his measure with that of Governor Mapp's.

On Thursday, Mr. Roach told The Consortium he would lobby his colleagues in an attempt to bring the bill to the Senate floor next week. And he said the measure would be a hybrid of sorts, including the best ideas of Mr. Mapp's and that best ideas of his own measure. The senator, who is running as a lieutenant governor candidate with Bryan Roach in this year's general election, said he along with the current governor could take credit for what has been billed a monumental achievement in the territory's history.

Mr. Mapp's plan, which Government House said today was developed in conjunction with UVI, allows graduates from any U.S. Virgin Islands school – public or private -- to apply for four years of free tuition regardless of their age or date of graduation. The governor -- like Mr. Roach -- has said the free tuition program will propel the Virgin Islands as a national leader in its commitment to educational advancement. Once the bill is approved, the V.I. Workforce Development Scholarship Program is set to begin in the fall of 2019 and will cover full tuition for students seeking either an associate's or bachelor's degree in any course of study offered by UVI. Provisions will be made for students dislocated because of the hurricanes.

According to Government House, the governor told Mr. Jackson that both the director of the Office of Management & Budget, Julio Rhymer, and Mr. Hall would be available to offer testimony on October 26. He urged senators not to further delay consideration of the measure.

"In my view, this bill is important and can be life-changing for many in our community," Mr. Mapp wrote. "Because of its importance, I believe that many within the Legislature agree that we should act on this matter so UVI can appropriately prepare to implement this program."

According to Mr. Hall, time is running out for the measure's implementation, which would provide for free tuition at UVI beginning Fall 2019. Mr. Hall, in a letter addressed to all lawmakers, expressed the bill's urgency and the consequences of not moving

expeditiously.

“We are writing today to request your support for moving forward with the Senate’s deliberation of the free tuition bills that have been submitted to the Senate. It is imperative that this matter is addressed soon if it is to have any impact on those students and individuals who hope to attend college in the Fall of 2019,” Mr. Hall wrote in the letter. ““The University hereby requests that a hearing of the Senate as a whole be convened immediately so that this important initiative can be addressed. We realize that there are two different bills on this topic that have been presented to the Senate, and this should serve as compelling evidence of how important it is for Legislature to move this matter forward.”

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