

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Free College Tuition In USVI Closer To Reality Following Bill's Passage In Senate

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Free college tuition in the U.S. Virgin Islands will soon be law, after the 32nd Legislature -- during its last Senate session held on Friday -- voted unanimously in favor of Bill No. 32-0328, sponsored by Senator Tregenza Roach.

Mr. Roach, who will start his tenure as lieutenant governor on January 7, thanked Governor Kenneth Mapp for a funding source that made the legislation viable. Mr. Roach is the original sponsor of tuition aid in the USVI; he first introduced the bill in the 30th Legislature, and resubmitted it in the 31st and 32nd. Yet though lawmakers over the years supported the idea, without a funding source, it never gained traction.

Then, on September 11, [Mr. Mapp announced his own free college tuition bill](#), crafted by UVI, that included a funding source. Interest in the idea grew quickly, and it became abundantly clear that free college tuition was on the horizon in the USVI.

Because Mr. Roach held the authorship of the bill, though Mr. Mapp's measure came with a funding source, it could not be moved through the Senate unless Mr. Roach allowed it. But instead of allowing the governor's measure to go through, the senator said he would take the best ideas of each bill to create something that benefited students. Contents of Mr. Roach's bill are [here](#). Details of the UVI measure introduced to the public by Mapp are [here](#).

UVI President David Hall had stressed the importance of approving the free tuition measure swiftly. In a letter addressed to all lawmakers in October, he 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."