

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Arbitrator Overturns Lisa Hassel-Forde's Suspension By Dept. Of Education

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ST. THOMAS -- Arbitrator Mark C. Travis on Tuesday awarded a full reversal of the suspension of Lisa Hassel-Forde, principal of Addelita Cancryn Junior High School, a release Mrs. Hassel-Forde's attorney issued Friday has made known. The ruling overturned former Virgin Islands Department of Education Commissioner of Education Sharon McCollum's January 26, 2018 suspension of Dr. Hassel-Forde from her position as principal of Addelita Cancryn Junior High School on St. Thomas for 60 working days.

Mrs. Hassel-Forde retained experienced labor attorney Ravi Nagi with the St. Thomas firm of BoltNagi PC as her personal attorney in the matter of her suspension in addition to the union attorney Pedro K. Williams for the St. Thomas-St. John Educational

Administrators' Association, according to the release. Together the attorneys fought the suspension of Mrs. Hassel-Forde by her supervisors at the Department of Education and the administration of former Governor Kenneth E. Mapp, the release said.

"My client is overjoyed that she was vindicated against all the forces that lined up against her without a shred of evidence to suspect she committed any wrongdoing. This was a personal and political vendetta gone wrong from the beginning," Mr. Nagi said. "The damage to Dr. Hassel-Forde's professional reputation has already been done by those forces, but this ruling will help repair the years of suspicion and the multitude of falsehoods that were publicly directed at her by Department of Education supervisors, politicians, and other prominent community members who spoke prior to the facts being presented."

The arbitrator found that the Government of the Virgin Islands had illegally suspended Mrs. Hassel-Forde for the loss from Cancryn Junior High School after Hurricanes Irma and Maria severely damaged the school in 2017, according to the release. The government's suspension was ruled to have been wrongfully based on Dr. Hassel-Forde's failure to adhere to a fiscal policy that was implemented in December 2017; which occurred after the September 2017 burglary, it added.

The release further stated that the arbitrator ultimately ordered that due to the lack of just cause to suspend, the Virgin Islands Department of Education must compensate Mrs. Hassel-Forde her full back-pay that was withheld during her 60 working day suspension, all her accrued sick and personal leave restored, all health insurance premiums paid by Mrs. Hassel-Forde be reimbursed, the expungement of all record of the investigation and suspension, return of the school checkbooks and all financial authority to Mrs. Hassel-Forde, that Mrs. Hassel-Forde is not responsible for the reimbursement of the funds stolen from the school and that she and the Union are entitled to payment of their attorneys' fees by the Government of the Virgin Islands.