

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Education Commissioner Nominee Held In Committee As Senators Express Preparedness Concerns

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ST. THOMAS -- Racquel Berry-Benjamin's nomination to be the Department of Education's commissioner was held in the Committee on Rules and Judiciary late Thursday, after some lawmakers, including committee chair Alicia Barnes, expressed concerns with Ms. Berry-Benjamin's preparedness to lead the sprawling department.

Ms. Berry, who was nominated by Governor Albert Bryan, read an inspiring testimony into the record, but at the same time, according to Ms. Barnes -- who requested that the nomination be held -- it failed to demonstrate concern for the myriad of problems facing the department, not the least of which being a majority of students in the territory's public schools falling behind in math and English. According to Ms. Berry-Benjamin, 70 percent

of the territory's public school students from K-12 were underperforming in math, while another 54.7 percent were underperforming in English -- two of learning's most important subjects.



Senator Alicia Barnes, chairwoman of the Committee on Rules and Judiciary

Ms. Barnes described the data as a state of crisis for the territory's students, a notion that Ms. Berry-Benjamin agreed with.

Yet, Ms. Barnes said, the testimony placed on record failed to relay an urgency to attack the problems facing the department. In fact, the freshman senator said all of the nominees who came before the Senate as of 7:00 p.m. Thursday -- Ms. Berry Benjamin, Property and Procurement Commissioner Nominee Anthony Thomas and Bureau of Internal Revenue Director Nominee Joel Lee -- gave what Ms. Barnes described as

superficial testimonies. The senator did not pin all the blame on the nominees, however, stating, "The nominees can only be as prepped by the person who prepped them and the governor who nominated them." Barbara McIntosh, Governor Bryan's nominee to lead the Bureau of Motor Vehicle, was still giving testimony at time of this story's writing.

The vote to hold Ms. Berry-Benjamin's nomination in committee was unanimous, with all seven committee members voting in favor.

Feature Image: Racquel Berry Benjamin, courtesy VI Legislature

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