

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## Bryan Wants To Use \$6 Million Provided By Federal Gov't For School Repairs On Dept. of Education Executive Offices

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Governor Albert Bryan has directed that funds granted to the Dept. of Education by the U.S. Dept. of Interior for school repairs and maintenance, go instead towards renovation and construction of Dept. of Education executive offices.

The directive to the Office of Management and Budget from the executive branch came in the form of line-items in the 2019-2020 executive budget, and was revealed during a Committee on Finance hearing on Monday.

A line in the budget accompanying the re-purposing of funds says Mr. Bryan approved the "redirection of funds towards the construction/renovation of Dept. of Education executive offices."

Senators immediately pounced, stating that such a request would not be allowed by the Senate -- especially when the territory's schools are in dire need of repair. "There's no way that we can redirect \$4.5 million to Dept. of Education executive office and we have not earmarked money for summer maintenance. There's no way," said Senator Kurt Violet. At the time, Mr. Violet had calculated the amount to be \$4.5 million before it was revealed that the amount was actually \$6 million.

"I'm very appalled at this," said Senator Oakland Benta, as he asked O.M.B. Director Jenifer O'Neal to ascertain that it does not happen.

Senator Donna Frett-Gregory noted that the funds were granted by the U.S. Department of Interior, and she asked whether the administration sent a request to the D.O.I. to have the funds be transferred.

"Personally I do not know. I would have to go back and look to see what was submitted, if something was indeed submitted, and see what it was," Ms. O'Neal said.

Mrs. Frett-Gregory gave some advice. "I would strongly suggest that we do not submit anything like this to [the Dept. of Interior] because it's not a good look on the Virgin Islands, especially since our schools are completely in disarray."

"I agree," Ms. O'Neal responded.

"You can't touch Interior's money unless you go to Interior and request that, and they have to allow that," said Vincent Thomas, O.M.B. assistant director.

Mr. Violet added: "There's no way Interior is going to redirect monies that was going to schools for executive office. No way. And there's no way this body is going to recommend that that also takes place."