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Bill Seeking to Hire Instructors on Contract to Bolstering C.T.E. Held in Committee; Measure Aimed at Creating Policy for Online Learning Moves Forward

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Editor's Note: The Consortium has issued a correction to this story, which previously stated that the C.T.E. bill was approved, though the measure was held.

A bill that would authorize the Dept. of Education to hire, on a contractual basis, instructors in a variety of fields to supplement Career and Technical Education Center (C.T.E.) programs, was held on Wednesday in the Committee on Education and Workforce Development hearing after facing fierce resistance.

However, a measure sponsored by Senator Donna Frett-Gregory that requires the Board of Education to establish an online learning policy, and requires the Department of Education to implement the program and ensure that various requirements and standards are met, was approved.

"C.T.E. is my passion. I learned auto mechanics at the Charlotte Amalie High School in the 70s, and to this day, I can fix any vehicle," said bill sponsor Sen. Dwayne DeGraff. "The idea of trying to get professionals to join the ranks as teachers to teach C.T.E. seems to be such a daunting task that it basically doesn't exist anymore."

While the legislation would allow D.O.E. to hire the necessary instructors to teach C.T.E. students, many testifiers were opposed to the bill. Carol Callwood, president of the St. Thomas-St. John Federation of Teachers, said the hiring of industry professionals alone would not solve the problem.

Along with Mr. Callwood, Michael Francois, chairman of the VI Board for Career and Technical Education, disputed the measure, stating, "After numerous reviews and discussions, VIBCTE would first like to state that Bill 33- 0344 will only further erode the power of VIBCTE.

Moreover, the bill does not resolve why it is difficult to attract qualified individuals as instructors for our C.T.E. programs."

Although testifiers conveyed that they understood the importance of C.T.E./vocational programs, many said the proposed measure does not appear to offer the D.O.E. a new solution to attract instructors. In actuality, they expressed, the measure may instead hurt or hinder the C.T.E. certification process. Ms. Rosa Soto-Thomas, president of the St. Croix Federation of Teachers, said, "We understand the impetus of this bill is to address the shortages of C.T.E. teachers. However, this is the wrong way to go about solving a problem."

Asked how the bill would hurt C.T.E. certification, Mr. Francois said, "Each organization that offers an industry certification has specific curriculums that the instructors have to follow. On top of that, those instructors must be certified in that industry. If we hire a licensed electrician who is not certified in NCCR, even if he's teaching the course and our program is an NCCR certified program, at the end of the course whether the students pass the test or not, [they] will not be able to get certified because their instructor wasn't certified in that industry certification."

Mr. DeGraff in his final statement asked the committee and those who testified, "What narrative do we want to put forward? C.T.E. is basically withering away; it's dying. We are the persons tasked to save it from dying or revive it if it dies." The measure was held.

Senators also took up Bill No. 33-0360, which requires the Board of Education to establish an online learning policy and requires the Department of Education to implement the program and ensure that various requirements and standards are met.

Unlike Mr. DeGraff's bill, testifiers were all in agreement with the Frett-Gregory-sponsored measure. Dept. of Education Commissioner, Racquel Berry-Benjamin praised it.

"Bill No. 33-0360 is timely as distance learning has become necessary in the technological world in which we live. It is considered essential for success in today's modern way of living, working, and learning," she said.

According to Ms. Frett-Gregory, the measure gives students in grades 9-12 an opportunity to take courses that they may not have had a chance to take due to teacher shortages. For example, if the

bill becomes law, D.O.E. would be able to offer classes online that students have shown interest in, such as learning another foreign language besides Spanish and French.

"Our students cannot continue to be on the downside of the spectrum because we are not offering them the opportunities available," said Ms. Frett-Gregory. "We need to level the playing field."

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