

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Department of Labor Discusses Plans For Summer Youth Employment Programs

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The Department of Labor spoke before the Committee of Youth, Sports, Parks and Recreation about their plan to bring back paid summer employment opportunities with the goal of employment and retention of young Virgin Islanders and while senators commended the intention and effort behind these programs they shared some grievances they had with the Department of Labor.

Cindy Richardson, The Assistant Commissioner of the Department of Labor, spoke about the Work, Learn and Earn program, The Summer Youth Work Experience Program, and

the Labor Investing for Tomorrow.

In Ms. Richardson's testimony she explained that the Work, Learn and Earn program is a 12-week paid work experience for out-of-school youth ages 17- 24 with little or no work experience. She hopes the experience "will provide them with the skills development, orientation and exposure to career opportunities, and connections to full-time employment." The program helps about 20-25 Virgin Islanders a year and has a success rate of 81 percent.

The Summer Youth Work Experience Program connects over 600 Virgin Islanders aged 14-25 with career exploration opportunities and paid work experience. In 2019, the program provided 623 with paid summer employment opportunities with over 113 businesses in the territory according to Ms. Richardson.

Ms. Richardson said "While we are aware that we are in the midst of a pandemic, we are striving to provide meaningful work experience to our youth while keeping them safe. Thus, we surveyed past employers to gauge interest in hosting our program participants and to determine the delivery of our programs. After receiving responses from over 55 employers as of February 18, we decided to move forward."

Only 2 percent of employers that responded preferred virtual delivery and 98 percent said they were ready to provide the necessary PPE equipment according to the opening statement from the Assistant Commissioner during the section about this program.

The testimony explained that The Labor Investing for Tomorrow program is directed towards college juniors and seniors and gives the students the opportunity to work in the Virgin Islands in their field of study during the program and that this program has a competitive application process and will be accepting 50 applicants this year. In the past it was usually 30 students, but last year only 20 interns participated in a very different program due to COVID-19.

Students need at least a 2.8 GPA after at least 60 collegiate credits and write an essay for the Labor Investing for Tomorrow.

Applications for these programs are available online and more information could be found on their [website](#) or on [Facebook](#).

While the majority of the senators' comments during the questioning were about program specifics, some concerns arose during the hearing.

Senator Javan James Sr made mention of how hard it is for the private sector to get involved in the program and said, "I feel as if the private sector has to be running you guys down to be a part of this program, when it should be the other way around." He mentioned someone he knew that has already established a curriculum to teach youth how to operate a crane but he claimed he sent the Board of Workforce Development a document that speaks to this but "up to this day, you think they would sit down with the young man and say come in let's find out how we can make this happen, I am tired of the games."

Senator James expressed his concern that there has been a lack of agricultural opportunities for young people through the Department of Labor programs as the Virgin Islands are reliant on importing goods. "The Virgin Islands spends over 500 million dollars in importing food, and if we have our youth exposed to this industry from a very young age, they can tap into that large sum of money."

Senator Frankie Johnson asked if there were programs for students with disabilities, and was told that all the programs are available for students with disabilities, and he said that this fact should be advertised to not deter students with disabilities from applying because they think the programs aren't for them.

Senator Samuel Carrion expressed concern about the outreach to the Spanish community and requested that the D.O.L forward his office Spanish versions of the English pamphlets, which the assistant commissioner said that they will provide when it's available.