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## Dept. of Labor a No-Show at Hearing as Molloy Points to Recent Appearance as Reason to Skip; Lack of Unified Data Within Gov't Addressed

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The Department of Labor was invited to a Senate hearing for the Committee of Education and Workforce Development Monday but did not attend, forcing committee chair, Genevieve Whitaker, to explain why it was important for the department to be present for hearings in the committee. The committee was attempting to hear from the department relative to Covid-19 unemployment and additional issues.

Department of Labor Commissioner Gary Malloy indicated in his correspondence that he did not need to testify because he testified to these items already.

Ms. Whitaker expressed her dismay. "It is my position, and I'm sure the position of all of my colleagues, that we have jurisdiction areas and exercising oversight of the requisite agencies that fall under our committee of jurisdiction. It is important for us to hear from those commissioners and directors by way of transparency as we break down the information and we go through this process for hearings."

Other invited testifiers that were absent: the Board of Workforce Development and ICF Incorporated, L.L.C.

Ms. Whitaker had a similar tone when addressing the Board of Workforce Development's absence. "The Workforce Development Board is at the center of workforce development. To highlight a problem we have, we have a situation where persons who have the responsibility to execute are falling behind." Ms. Whitaker also stated that the board has \$10 million to use for workforce development and it is the committee's job to provide oversight.

"Today was to find out from the main vendor, the vendor that is getting all of this workforce money, what are they doing with money. That's the goal," said Ms. Whitaker. She suggested that members of the Board of Workforce Development petition for meetings as the board is not meeting at this time.

ICF was awarded a contract for the "Skills for Today" project but requested that it testifies when the details get finalized later this spring.

Even with the absences, the Department of Human Services, UVI CELL and the Board of Career and Technical Education testified on Monday.

An issue that was brought up during the hearing by Senator Janelle Sarauw was the lack of data to help drive government policy and actions. Ms. Sarauw asked the Department of Human Services and other agencies whether they were utilizing [the Virgin Islands Virtual Information System](#) (VIVIS). She was told by D.H.S. Assistant Commissioner, Michal Rhymer-Browne, that VIVIS has not been very active in the Virgin Islands government, which frustrated the senator. "Data drives policy, so we are having all these discussions today, but have we had a tracking system on VIVIS?"

VIVISS was first established during the John P. de Jongh administration. It functions within the V.I. Dept. of Education, providing for new protocols regarding personal information, approved data uses, and maintaining the confidentiality and distribution of data. The VIVIS was put in place back in 2013 at a cost of more than \$2.6 million.

She added, "To have a discussion on workforce development, issues surrounding our people, how can we improve them without the comprehensive data? Not data just from D.H.S. This government continues to work in a silo over and over again and we expect different results. That's the definition of insanity."

The concern from the senator was that millions were used to establish VIVIS and she did not want to see that money go to waste. "Do we allow a three-point-something million dollar project to just die?"

D.H.S. Commissioner Kimberley Causey-Gomez said in response, "This is a conversation we've had internally speaking. I do agree with you that data does drive policy, it also drives what you need in order to accommodate the needs of our community. In light of today's discussion, I'll make sure to bring it up again to bring it back around to ensure that we have a system."

Ms. Sarauw went on to say, “Nothing is more frustrating than to sit in a budget markup and to craft policy with no data.” The senator compared the Virgin Islands to a popular cartoon: “We are in the Flintstones era.”

Ms. Sarauw followed up in her second round of questioning. “I’m just a bit exhausted today and I think my tone expresses my exhaustion of the fact that we are just having conversations and that we are in planning, we are in preparation, we doing this, we going to meet next week and the streets are running red.”

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