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Sarauw Calls on Dept. of Education to Release Funds Owed to Feeding Initiative Workers

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Senator Janelle Sarauw By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

Senator Janelle Sarauw is calling on the V.I. Dept. of Education to disburse funds owed to employees of the "No Child Goes Hungry" feeding initiative, payment the senator contends is some three months behind.

According to the release, on September 17, 2021, the 34th Legislature of the Virgin Islands passed Bill No. 34-0106, a supplemental budget to the already enacted FY 2022 Government of the Virgin Islands operating budget. Subsection R, section 1(c) was amended by Senator Sarauw to insert the following language: "No Virgin Islands Child Goes Hungry" feeding initiative service workers \$200,000.00 A payment of \$1000 must be remitted to each service worker of the "No

Virgin Islands Child Goes Hungry” feeding initiative who worked from March 1, 2020 to May 13, 2021. Payment must be remitted by December 31, 2021.

The bill, which became Act 8473 upon the governor’s signature on September 21, 2021, has not been fully executed, as some three months later, the money still has not been disbursed, said Ms. Sarauw.

In the height of the ongoing pandemic, the feeding initiative by the Department of Education saw service and school lunch workers providing breakfast and lunch to students attending public, private and parochial schools in the territory.

“While many employees of the Department of Education undoubtedly tackled a myriad of adversities in the wake of the pandemic, with some having to navigate a new virtual world, service and school lunch workers of the “No Virgin Islands Child Goes Hungry” feeding initiative remained physically on the frontline of the pandemic, providing service to our students, despite the potential risks to their own health and that of their families,” stated Ms. Sarauw.

She said the Bryan administration utilized CARES Act funding to incentivize teachers in the public education system during the pandemic. "However, for whatever reason, food service workers within the same department were not included in the initiative," stated the release. Ms. Sarauw said she saw it fit to bring parity to the situation by including within the supplemental budget, a total sum of \$200,000 for \$1,000 payments to be remitted to those food service workers that continued to serve students during the pandemic.

Approaching the 4th month since the legislation was signed into law, with no payments disbursed, Sen. Sarauw is calling on the department to urgently release payment to these service workers for their courageous work in such uncertain times.

“We already know who the eligible individuals are, as my office requested that information from the department in order to determine the accurate appropriation amount for the bill," she said. "Our processes under our seemingly perpetual State of Emergency are taking entirely too long. It is imperative the service workers of the feeding initiative receive this relief package to compensate for the sacrifices they made while ensuring the nourishment of our most vulnerable youth population during the pandemic."