

The Virgin Islands Consortium

USVI Residents Given Opportunity to Comment on Waiver Seeking to Increase On-the-Job Employer Training Reimbursement

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U.S. Virgin Islands residents are being given an opportunity to comment on a labor waiver request that seeks to increase on-the-job training reimbursement by up to 90 percent for businesses with 50 employees or less.

The Virgin Islands State Workforce Development Board is seeking public comment on or before March 9 as part of the preparation to submit the waiver to the U.S. Department of Labor for approval.

According to Career Source Brevard, which provides workforce solutions to help keep businesses operating and thriving, on-the-job training is training provided by an employer to a paid eligible participant while engaged in productive work in a job that:

- Provides knowledge or skills essential to the full and adequate performance of the job.
- Provides reimbursements to the employer of up to 50% of the wage rate of the participant to off-set the costs of providing training and the additional supervision related to the training of a new hire.
- Is limited in duration as appropriate to the occupation for which the participant is being trained, taking into account the content of the training, the prior work experience of the participant, and the employment plan of the participant.

Comments on the waiver should be submitted by email no later than 4:00 p.m. March 9 to viswdb@dol.vi.gov.

A release in the form of an information leaflet from the board explains that on-the-Job training is a tried and true method of work-based training, especially in times of recovery from natural or other disasters.

“Employers need a strong workforce, but when one is not readily available, quick but effective turnaround training is needed. The V.I. has seen a need for such activity, especially in the construction industry,” said the leaflet which explains that while general theoretical knowledge is necessary, learning through performance allows for a quick ramp-up of the local workforce.

The leaflet further clarifies that through on-the-job initiatives, employers are able to meet their objectives and job seekers are introduced to and learn to perform in an actual work environment.

For smaller companies that do not regularly have a large workforce on standby, this waiver allows them the opportunity to employ individuals who may still be dislocated from other employment, while still being able to use their limited resources for other critical aspects of job performance.

“Modernization of the workplace and the methods used for learning must be prioritized to meet today’s job demands. Employers are now faced with several new initiatives such as providing on-the-job medical screenings such as temperature checks, flexibility with the standard 9-5 office/business hours, fully automating their businesses to allow for virtual operational hours,” says the leaflet, which points out that under the waiver, emphasis will be placed on closing the digital divide.

Arguing that assisting current and new business owners will sharpen their focus because they will be provided with partnerships with the Small Business Development Center, the boards is of the opinion that the U.S. Department of Labor also prioritizes the need for work-based learning situations.

“It connects education and training strategies and fulfills the gaps in sector-driven demand areas. This waiver allows for smaller businesses to be more flexible with the use

of their resources and increase their labor force thus making them more competitive for jobs often afforded to larger companies who are able to absorb the cost of a larger workforce,” said the leaflet which outlined other benefits to both employers and employees.

“It also builds capacity for smaller companies by allowing for the use of local talent rather than having to undergo costly recruitment from off-island,” according to the leaflet.

The waiver is posted online and available for public comment at www.viwib.org.