

# Absence of Education Officials at Hearing Leads to Failure of Bill Seeking to Mandate V.I. and Caribbean History in Public Schools

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Linda Straker **June 02, 2022**

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Senator Kurt Vialet, a member of the Committee on Education and Workforce Development is of the opinion that the V.I. Department of Education and the V.I. Board of Education are showing disrespect to the committee by their multiple failures to attend or send representation to hearings.

The committee was on Wednesday scheduled to receive testimony regarding the status of all curriculum mandates, however, the testifiers from the board and education department as well as a representative from the Department of Agriculture did not show up. The Dept. of Education submitted a letter stating that the hearing clashed with another scheduled activity — an end-of-school-year beach gathering at Cramer's Park on St. Croix for St. Croix D.O.E. staff. A self-same event is scheduled for St. Thomas Friday.

Because of this, important measures could not be fully vetted, including a bill that sought to mandate the teaching of Virgin Islands and Caribbean history in Virgin Islands schools from K-12th grade.

“You cannot tell me today because of an appreciation day for the Department of Education on St. Croix, not one management individual is able to testify, not one person! So, you are telling me the director of Education from St. Thomas could not attend, she is over here for the appreciation party too?” Violet said during the hearing.

“For this appreciation day, this committee cannot be shown respect and somebody from D.O.E. come to this meeting that the chair requested three weeks ago? We can’t have an assistant commissioner from Agriculture that can come and attend this meeting?” he added.

“We have an assistant commissioner in Agriculture, it is clearly saying that they are singing for their supper so maybe they should sing for their jobs and come here and represent for the people of the Virgin Islands. Every time the chair has a meeting there is a certain level of disrespect by not showing up because they feel it’s not important enough for them to show up and at some point, that must change,” the veteran lawmaker stated. This is not the first time Dept. of Education and Board of Education officials have missed hearings organized by the Committee on Education and Workforce Development.

Importantly, the committee received testimony on [Bill No. 34-0238](#), which is an Act amending Virgin Islands Code relating to courses of study in public schools to require that Virgin Islands and Caribbean history be taught specifically in Kindergarten through 12th grade. But the bill failed to receive the required support when it was time to vote on the motion and thus was held in committee. A major reason for this, according to senators, was the absence of Board of Education and Dept. of Education officials, whose testimony on the bill is paramount to understand the measure's impact, implementation and other factors.

Senators present for the hearing included Mr. Violet, Genevieve Whitaker, Janelle Sarauw, Milton Potter, Donna Frett-Gregory, Carla Joseph and Kenneth Gittens. Non-committee member Samuel Carrion also participated and described the lack of representation as troubling.

Board of Career and Technical Education Chairman Michael T. Francois was present to testify on Act 8374, whose aim is to "strengthen and expand the pathways to career readiness" and to "build on the career and technical (vocational) education program that allows high school students to gain exposure in their desired vocational career field, obtain national qualifications, and to incentivize qualified local businesses territory-wide to participate."

Mr. Francois said the Act's stated mission is currently not being fulfilled because of obstacles from the Dept. of Education, including the lack of communication among other factors. D.O.E. was unable to respond because invited testifier, Education Commissioner Racquel Berry-Benjamin was not present.