

EDUCATION ENTITIES CALL FOR LUMP SUM FY2020 BUDGET APPROPRIATIONS

Date : July 19, 2019

ST. CROIX--The Committee on Finance chaired by Senator Kurt A. Violet received testimony in the morning session of a budget hearing on Thursday in the UVI Great Hall, St. Croix regarding Fiscal Year 2020 Budget for the VI Department of Education (VIDE); VI Board of Education (VIBE); and the Career and Technical Education Board (CTEB).

In her testimony, Racquel Berry-Benjamin, Commissioner, VIDE said \$179,789,546 has been recommended for FY 2020 from the General Fund. This includes \$103,398,438 for Personnel Services; \$45,325,527 for Fringe Benefits; \$4,075,900 for Supplies; \$20,953,305 for Other Services and Charges; \$5,895,376 for Utilities; and \$150,000 for Capital Outlay.

This appropriation represents, she added, a net increase of \$7,464,543 more than total funds received under the General Fund for FY 2019. This increase is attributed to additional funding under the Other Services category for repairs and maintenance, professional services, security services, training and travel costs.

According to the Commissioner, the increase also consists of \$2,337,5000 earmarked for specific programs and grants that are normally funded under the miscellaneous section of the budget submission.

In respect to federal funds, she pointed out that, for FY 2020, VIDE anticipates receiving federal grant awards

of approximately \$30,842,938. These grants are awarded by the United States' Department of Education (USDE) and Agriculture (USDA). Additionally, the department is currently managing another \$39,560,627 in federal grants through the USDE for FY 2016-2018.

According to her, all programs have developed detailed and aggressive spending and action plans in order to obligate \$13,316,258 in FY 2016-2017 grant funds set to expire on September 30, 2019.

In a presentation to the Committee, Dionne Wells-Hedrington Ed.D., Chief Operation Officer said, the VIDE's physical plant is comprised of 45 schools and administrative support facilities within both districts. This would require approximately \$20 million per year to maintain, as determined by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

According to her, the average age of VIDE buildings is nearly 50 years old, with many have been built 70 years ago, and one building in use that was built in the 1800s. She pointed out that the schools were in continuous state of deuteriation, crumbling under the weight of \$70, million of deferred maintenance before Hurricanes Irma and Maria. To date, a total of approximately \$116,509,712, in FEMA funds has been obligated for emergency and temporary repair work.

According to other testimony, a total allocation of approximately \$4,722,027.59 are funded through the Consolidated Grant under the Rural and Low-Income School Program (RLIS). The funds include: \$279,976.15 for Administration and Technical Support; \$1,245,783.31-Alternative Education; \$324,044.67-Educator Quality and Professional Development; and \$143,897.53-English Langue Leaners.

In addition to the above, there

were also: \$295,727.33 for Parent and Community Engagement; \$387,196.16-Safe and Healthy Schools; \$485,967.98-Technology Integration for Students Success; and \$1,559,434.42-Well Rounded Students. It was pointed out that the balance of the STT/STJ District funds are allocated to non-public schools for their supplemented programs in the amount of \$1,743,855.77.

Commissioner Berry-Benjamin said, for VIDE to address emergencies and other urgent matters, they respectfully request a lump sum appropriation for FY 2020.

Arah Lockhart, Chairperson of the VIBE said their FY 2020 Budget operational request is \$1,760,721. There is also a request for \$1,305,966 in the Miscellaneous section of the General Fund for scholarships and special grants. Accordingly, the total FY 2020 lump sum request is \$3,066,687 which will cover Personnel Services at \$813,797; Capital Outlays \$50,000; Fringe Benefits \$343,418; Supplies \$42,394; Other Services and Charges \$466,112; and Special Legislative Grants \$1,305,966.

According to Lockhart, in FY 2018, the VIBE collected approximately \$522,234 in loan repayment and in FY 2019 to date, they have collected approximately \$424,986 as of July 16, 2019. The Committee was informed that VIBE is actively seeking assistance in ensuring that non-payment of the financial indebtedness can be reported to credit bureaus. Their available funding for scholarships, grants, and awards comes from a Special Legislative Awards of \$753,150 and Loan/Grants Award of \$552,816.

Lockhart told Committee members that for FY 2019, they have certified 113 professionals in the St. Thomas/St. John districts and 110 professionals in the St. Croix district.

Ronnie Jones, Board Chair

of CTEB said their formal request for FY 2020 is \$509,250. In his testimony, he focused on a list of goals

that were submitted to the legislature and a previous hearing. He added that the Board was hoping that additional board appointees were available to carry out the work required to achieve many of the goals presented.

According to Jones, the Board supported CTE programs by assisting with the procurement of books and materials. Explore potential new career programs that could augment the current CTE program offerings. Search avenues to support CTE programs financially. And, provide CTE students with opportunities to explore new and emerging careers in technology as well as having real life exposure to their chosen field.

The calling for a lump sum budget, by the various educational entities for FY 2020, Committee Chairman, Sen. Violet said he would not adhere to that factor, instead the committee will move to line-item their budget based upon specific needs such as maintenance and supplies.

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