

V.I. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION REQUESTS \$172,209,001 FOR FY 2019

Date : July 16, 2018

ST. THOMAS- Members of the Committee on Finance chaired by Sen. Kurt Vialet, held a meeting at the Capitol Building on Monday, to receive testimony from the V.I. Department of Education (VIDOE), the Career of Technical Education and, the Bureau of Internal Revenue on the Fiscal Year 2019 budget appropriations.

The governor's recommended budget for VIDOE is \$172,209,001. In comparison to the appropriation for FY 2018, this is an increase of \$5,158,171. The financial breakdown is as follows: \$102,531,874 for personnel services, \$45,987,889 for fringe benefits, \$3,998,910 for supplies, \$13,200,328 for other services and charges, and \$6,500,000 for utilities. "The primary areas impacted by the increase mentioned above are salary increases for the proposed bargaining unions," said Commissioner of Education Ann McCollum.

"Can you explain the increase of personnel services?" asked Sen. Jean Forde. Gerda Sebastian, Director of Business Affairs and Budget Control stated that \$1,000,000 is for vacant positions, \$10,000,000 for contractual negotiations, \$1,800,000 to fund the Substitute Teacher Pool, \$6,158,276 for exempt positions and \$83,573,5898 for classified positions. "The recommended budget allows VIDOE to maintain its current staffing level of 2,195 employees," added Commissioner McCollum.

"Who determined the figures of \$10,000,000 for contractual services?" asked Sen. Vialet. Commissioner McCollum stated that the Office of Management and Budget and the Chief Negotiator projected the numbers for FY 2019 for contractual services. Then Sen. Vialet inquired of the role of Witt O'Brien with VIDOE. Thomas Allen, Chief of Staff of VIDOE, stated that Witt O'Brien had provided hurricane disaster relief estimated at \$150,000,000 to assist VIDOE

throughout the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Territory-wide, there was a total of 1,471,676 school lunches distributed through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and 503,073 breakfasts served through the School Breakfast Program (SBP) in the School Year 2017-2018. The combined reimbursements for SY 2016-2017 was \$4,918,989.86. However, VIDOE experienced a decline in reimbursement for SY 2017-2018.

“Why is there a significant reduction in reimbursement for School Year 2017-2018?” inquired Marvin Blyden. Commissioner McCollum said, “The NSLP and the SBP have earned a combined reimbursement value of \$1,673,143.47. The reimbursement loss of \$3,245,846.39 is because of the impact of Hurricanes Irma and Maria; which has also adversely affected student enrollment.”

Separately, the Virgin Islands Career and Technical Education Board (CTEB) shared the FY 2019 recommended budget. Ilene Garner, Chair of CTEB stated that the governor’s recommended budget for FY 2019 is \$509,350. The funds include \$55,000 for textbooks, \$45,000 for the National and Local Travel for students and \$35,000 for teacher and professional development. “Technical programs are rapidly changing and becoming more complex. To ensure that our students are prepared to compete, they must stay on the cutting edge of existing and emerging technologies,” said Garner.

Similarly, Marvin Pickering, Director of the Bureau of Internal Revenue shared the governor’s recommended budget for FY 2019 totaling \$12,578,546. The budget breakdown is as follows: \$6,777,230 for personnel services, \$3,027,688 for fringe benefits, \$82,500 for supplies, \$2,275,128 for other services and charges, \$100,000 for capital outlays, \$235,587 for communication and \$316,000 for utilities.

Senators present are Kurt Vialet, Brian Smith, Neville James, Dwayne DeGraff, Tregenza Roach, Marvin Blyden and, Nereida Rivera O’Reilly
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