

Committee on Education and Workforce Development | March 15, 2021

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0:00:00 Music Music Music Music We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you.

[illegible]

0:27:57 Good morning, good morning everyone, good morning to all the listening and viewing audience, good morning to all my colleagues, good morning to the staff of the Legislature, a pleasant good morning. Today is Monday, March 15th, today I am the Chairwoman of the Committee on Educational Workforce Development. I want to thank all those involved in making today possible, especially members of my staff. What we'll begin today, first I will begin by first doing the roll call of the members of the committee, then we'll proceed with reading correspondence by any members of my committee in terms of any absence or tardiness, and then we will proceed with putting the agenda on the record. There will be, to note, there has been a change to the agenda in the context of what's taking place in block one where we have a testifier who will not be testifying however has placed will be placing on the record correspondence from that invited testifier commissioner garv malloy so go ahead madam clerk please read the roll call hello Kenneth L. Gittins. Senator Kenneth

L. Gittins absent. Senator Donna A. Fred Gregory. Senator Sen. Donna Fred Gregory absent. Sen. Carla J. Joseph absent. Sen. Milton E. Potter.

0:29:57 I believe. Senator Potter, do I? Okay. Senator Potter, I guess he's over on. Yep. He's present. Senator Milton E. Potter, present. Senator Janelle K. Saru. Senator Janelle K. Saru, absent. Senator Kirk A. Viale, absent. Senator Genevieve R. Whitaker, present. Senator Genevieve R. Whitaker, present. Chairwoman? How many absent, how many present do we have?

0:30:39 Five absents and two present. Thank you. At this time, we do have correspondence regarding the committee member for my committee member. Janelle K. Saru, Senator, 34, Legislature of the Virgin Islands. Honorable Genevieve Whitaker, 34, Legislature of the Virgin Islands, Capitol Building, P.O. Box 1690 St. Thomas VI 00804. Dear Senator Whitaker, this letter serves to inform you that I will be tardy to today's Committee on Education and Workforce Development meeting. Once available, I will be joining via teams from the Earl B. Utley Legislative Chamber, respectfully submitted, Janelle K. Saru.

0:31:29 So we'll change Senator Saru's, we'll change hers to excuse, and of course, once she's present, we'll mark her as present. Thank you. Next, any other correspondence? Legislature of the Virgin Islands, number 20th, Estate Golden Rock, Christian Stead VI 00820, March 15th, 2021. The Honorable Genevieve R. Whitaker, Chairperson, Committee on Education and Workforce Development. 34th, Legislature of the Virgin Islands 3022, Estate Golden Rock, Christian Stead VI 00820. Dear Senator Whitaker, due to a family emergency, I will not be able to be in attendance at today's Committee on Education and Workforce Development meeting. I apologize for any inconvenience this may cause. Thank you for your kind consideration in this matter. Respectfully, Kurt A. Viale, Senator, 34th Legislature of the Virgin Islands. Okay, and so Senator Viale as excused. Okay, so we'll now proceed with reading today's agenda into the record.

0:32:56 Memorandum 2, members of the Committee on Education and Workforce Development, Honorable Senator Janelle K. Saru, Vice Chair, Honorable Donna A. Fred Gregory, Honorable Kirk A. VLA, Honorable Kenneth L. Gittins, Honorable Milton E. Potter, Honorable Carla J. Joseph. Date March 10, 2021, Committee on Education and Workforce Development, March 15, 2021. The Committee on Education and Workforce Development has scheduled a hearing for Monday, March 15 2021 at 9 30 in the Fritz e lauretz legislature conference room on St Croix block one the committee will receive testimony on the state of the unemployment insurance lost wage assistance program and the federal pandemic unemployment assistance program invited testifiers Mr Gary Malloy Commissioner VI Department of Labor thank you very much so that is the so we have one testifier in block one and do we have any correspondence from Commissioner Molloy because of course we do he's not present so please we're gonna go ahead and place the correspondence letter from Commissioner Gary Molloy on the record Department of Labor, Office of Commissioner, March 11, 2021, Honorable Genevieve Whitaker, 3022 Estate, Golden Rock, Christian Stead, St. Croix, Dear Senator Whitaker, I am in receipt of your revised invitation and updated agenda for the Committee on Education and Workforce development meeting scheduled to be held on Monday March 15 2021 at 9 30 a.m at the Fritz e

0:34:51 Louette legislative conference room last month my team and I provided a comprehensive update regarding the unemployment insurance unit at the committee on finance meeting held on February 16 2021 I have enclosed a testimony for your perusal the testimony provided a bird's eye view of all the programs being administered by the unemployment insurance unit under the coronavirus aid relief and economic security act cares as you may know American Rescue Plan Act 2021 recently passed in the Congress yesterday this plan is 1.9 trillion dollars and will provide relief in many areas of government the agency is awaiting guidance from the U.S. Department of Labor on how to proceed and has no update to share at this time.

0:35:46 Also, in my recent communication on March 8, 2021, I expressed that my team provided testimony at the Committee on Youth Sports Parks and Recreation on February 24, 2021, regarding our youth and workforce development programs and attached a copy of the testimony for your perusal. In addition, as the Department of Labor is currently in contract negotiations with the Vendor ICF, Inc., LLC, who will be working in tandem with the agency on the Skills for Today project and workforce development functions, it would be more helpful to provide testimony after the contract is finalized in early spring. Therefore with great respect I decline your invitation to attend kindly note sharing this information with our mutual constituents is equally important to me I welcome the invitation at a more suitable time that will be beneficial to all sincerely Gary Molloy Commissioner thank you very much and so that is the correspondence from Commissioner Molloy and I will place clearly on the record. The Committee of Education and Workforce Development has jurisdiction specifically over the Department of Labor by way of workforce development and I take great exception to a commissioner informing me that because he testified to some aspects of unemployment and workforce development that we as a committee and as a body can't call him back before us because he even in the letter for you as you listened clearly said it was a bird's-eye view meaning that today we would have spent some time disposing

of the issues surrounding our unemployment crisis. There are a number of constituents. I have worked also along with my vice chair, Senator Saru, on intakes and constituents who have complaints regarding their unemployment payments, some as much as a few months, many others and it is a crisis and just as it is as it is a crisis with our school system and what's going on with the reopening so as we proceed forward and he in his letter also testified to workforce development and we have specific concerns surrounding the manner in which we're proceeding with workforce development and just to clarify in communicating to Commissioner Malloy I we reached out to him to ask for testimony specifically on an awarded contract. The work done behind the scenes included reaching out to the Department of Property and Procurement, our entity responsible for all of our central

0:38:33 government contracts, as well as the testimony given by the version of Housing Finance Authority director, Mr. Griffith, who placed in his testimony surrounding overall actually having specifically to do with disaster recovery, he indicated that a contract was awarded to the company in question and the company that it's also in block two. To this end, as we look to amend the agenda addressing this issue of a testifier who's essentially refusing to testify, we, and there's also other tools and methods that we will use going forward certainly when we have this type of situation again I think my colleagues and others as far as we work towards reforming our education system as well as addressing issues surrounding workforce so we're gonna proceed we we're gonna go ahead and just for gathering sake in terms of this adjustment sake what we're gonna do at this time is we're going to take take break and what we'll do we've asked all the testifiers in block two and adjusting their schedules to resume at 10 30 so to the media team to to my just my colleagues we're gonna go ahead and resume at 10 30 giving us an opportunity to you know to get ready and the adjustment that we've asked the block to invited testifiers to make for the public as it's always important for us to be on the same you know main you know should you know beyond you understand everything together the testimony testimonies invitations or correspondence is in the public drive on the legislature's website hvi.org go click on committees go to the education and workforce development committee then you'll find in the subfolder the the testimonies of correspondence and information we also post there any kind of communication we have following the hearings and so to that and I really encourage members of the public if you go ahead and download that of course the agenda is also on

0 : 40 : 48 displayed I will also express that as we go forward and we address our issues we have to do so in such a way that is strategic and we're going to continue to ask so behind the scenes also just want to make public that my office as well as others involved in education efforts continue to really address the issues around the school reopenings we are quite dedicated to that so in the coming weeks we will be revisiting the status of school reopenings we are really you know quite aware we are on top of the department education the board education and we are engaging all the stakeholders as we move forward in that regard so I'll take now we're going to take a recess when we'll start again at 10 30 this committee stands in recess We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

00:53:21 Thank you. We'll be right back. [2 such phrases repeated 34 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

1:10:21 Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you.

1:11:51 Thank you. We'll be right back. [2 such phrases repeated 24 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

1:23:51 The Committee on Education and Workforce Development is back out of recess okay first again good morning to all of the listening viewing audience thank you and thank you for everyone's patience so again we had a update to the agenda originally we had in block one Commissioner Gary Malloy to testify regarding our unemployment crisis which is what we're in in terms of issues surrounding the payment the CARES Act and the other just a regular employment unemployment programs and so but we're moving on now I want to thank the testifiers from Block 2 who have just really agreed to us to take part now.

1:24:57 And thank you so much for that understanding. Okay, so first I also want to acknowledge the presence of committee member, Senator Carla Joseph. Good morning, Senator Joseph. Thank you. Thank you. Okay, so we'll now proceed. Madam Clerk will proceed with reading what is now Block 2 at 10.30 a.m. the agenda for Block 2. All right, the committee will receive testimony as it pertains to workforce development, educational development, career and technical education, vocational rehabilitation, employment opportunities, and the Skills for Today Workforce Development Award.

1:25:45 All right, testifiers. All right, Department of Labor Correspondence, Office of Commissioner, March 8th, Honorable Genevieve Whitaker, Senator 3022, Estate Golden Rock, Christenstead St. Croix, Virgin Island 00820. Dear Senator

Whitaker, this correspondence confirms receipt of your invitation to provide testimony at the Committee on Education and Workforce Development Meeting scheduled to be held on Monday, March 15, 2021 at 9.30 a.m. at the Fritz E. Lowe's Legislative Conference Room. The Department of Labor is currently in contract negotiations with the vendor ICF LLC Incorporated, who will be working in tandem with the Agency on the Skills for Today project and workforce development functions. After review of your requests, my team and I have determined that it would be more helpful to provide testimony after the contract is finalized in early spring. To this end, I am respectfully requesting that we be allowed to present and provide a full oversight on plans for these programs once negotiations are complete. In the interim, the testimony the agency provided at the Committee on Youth, Sports Park and recreation on february 24 2021 can share insight on the current status on the information you are seeking thank you for your consideration sincerely gary malloy commissioner thank you i want to before we move on to actually read all of the names of testifiers in block two again we have commissioner Molloy presenting that he's already spoken about workforce development and to

1:27:39 also add he they are in contract negotiations for ICF the ICF company as put on as placed on the testimony by again Darrell Griffith version of Housing Finance Authority director the contract was already awarded in February last month to ICF for workforce development to the tune of 10 million dollars as part of the oversight efforts as part of myself as the chair and also working with committee members the effort we have jurisdiction over the Department of Labor and so it is important that as we go through processes where contracts are awarded and for purpose of transparency and information to the public is important that these things are laid out now I have no control we have levels of control over invited testifiers and my hope is that we will not have to exercise a particular tool which is a subpoena to get Commissioner Malloy to it to participate in a future hearing as soon as possible and so to that end we also just put into on the record we are going on four years post disaster and last year a number of presentations were made about workforce development and here we are today with a commissioner who said they cannot attend because they're still in negotiation for a contract that was already awarded there there's some there's some flags there but we'll move on madam clerk read all the names of the testifiers and their agencies and then we'll proceed with the first testifier okay and block two invited testifiers. Mr. Gary Malloy, Commissioner, Virgin Islands Department of Labor. Ms. Kimberly Cosi-Gomez, Commissioner, Virgin Islands Department of Human Services. Dr. Michael Francois, Chairman,

1:29:33 Career and Technical Education Board. Dr. Susan Darrow-McGrath, Director, University of the Virgin Islands Center for Excellence in Leadership and Learning. Mr. Michael Carty, Chairman, Virgin Islands Workforce Development Board, Mr. Bernard Molebski, Senior Contracts Administrator, ICF, Incorporated, LLC. Thank you. So we will proceed for it with our first testifier, Commissioner Kazi-Gomez. Also just for foundational basis, I will be asking each testifier for the case of the Commissioner, she's brought members of her team, I'll just ask the Commissioner I'll be reading an oath. Media, please, go ahead and let's have Commissioner Kazi-Gomez be featured, spotlighted. Thank you. Good morning to you, Commissioner, and thank you again for your attendance.

1:30:34 I'm very much appreciated. So at this time, I will read the oath of office and for the benefit of the public, the rules of the 34th legislature, and for those who are interested in the actual rule, I'm talking about rule number 507 of our rules, 507B. So Commissioner Kazi-Gomez, I will read the statement and you will just indicate I do. Please raise your right hand. Do you solemnly affirm under penalty of perjury that the testimony you will give to this committee will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth to the best of your knowledge and belief?

1:31:10 I do. Thank you very much. You may proceed. would you like to do an introduction of my team members yes yes thank you very much for that thank you yes and go ahead please proceed also introducing the your supports um and your leadership team thank you so much go ahead awesome my pleasure uh today we have commissioner mikhail rhymer brown and then we also have um director of um our csep program cindy rollins williams And I believe we have Ashariah Green who is the Administrator for our Disabilities and Rehabilitation Division. I think those are the only ones we have today for you.

1:31:58 Okay. So good morning Honorable Senator Genevieve R. Ritaker Chairwoman of the Committee on Education Workforce Development, Honorable Janelle K. Saru, Vice Chair, Committee members, my colleagues, and the listening and viewing audience. I'm Kimberly Cozzi-Gomez, Commissioner of the Virgin Islands Department of Human Services. It is our pleasure to appear before the committee to provide testimony on programs and services regarding workforce development, education and training, vocational rehabilitation, and senior employment opportunities provided by DHS. Joining me today are Mikael Reimer-Brown, Assistant Commissioner, Sharia Green, Administrator of the Division of Disabilities and Rehabilitation Services, and Cindy Rollins-Williams, Director of the Senior Community Service Employment Program, otherwise known as CSAP. The Virgin Islands Department of Human Services is the designated state agency responsible for the provision of vocational rehabilitation services. The VR program is administered by the U.S. Department of Education and authorized by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The goal of the program is to assess,

develop, plan, and provide vocational rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities consistent with their unique strengths, abilities, resources, priorities, concerns, interests, and informed choice so that they may prepare for and engage in an integrated employment outcome and acquire economic self-sufficiency. The Division of Disabilities and Rehabilitation Services or DRS consists of four programs, Vocational Rehabilitation, Independent Living Services for the Older Blind,

1:33:52 supported employment, and Randolph Shepard Business Entrepreneurial Program. The VR program is the largest component and is designed to ensure that individuals with disabilities overcome their barriers to gain full employment. In collaboration with its core and community partners, the program advocates for and supports the independent living philosophy. Eligibility requirements are determined based on the following. The applicant must have a physical emotional cognitive or learning disability that causes a substantial impediment to employment verification of the disability must be provided consequently the vr program pays for medical and psychiatric or psychological assessments if the applicant is financially not able to cover the cost associated it should also be noted that vr is not a primary payer of medical care but supplements private and or public health insurance programs the applicant also must need the services to prepare secure and maintain employment the program is also voluntary and services are based on your individual needs as determined by your plan of employment we have vocational rehabilitation collaborations the program collaborates with internal and external stakeholders such as the disabilities rights center of the virgin islands the virgin islands association for independent living the virgin islands university center for excellence and disabilities or viu said we also collaborate with mr julian henley the ada coordinator of the office of the governor and various councils and organizations that cater to needs of persons with disabilities. As mandated by the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act, each state or territory is required to submit a unified or combined plan to the United States Department of Labor. Vocational rehabilitation is engaged with the development and modifications

1:35:52 of this unified plan for the U.S. Virgin Islands. The plan outlines a four-year strategy to align services and programs for job seekers and businesses. The Vocational Rehabilitation program is an integral part of the workforce development system and as such is a core partner of the American Job Center also known as the One Stop System. Other partners include the Virgin Islands Department of Labor, the Virgin Islands Department of Education, Adult Education Career and Technical Program, and Job Corps. Upon referrals from the One Stop to facilitate successful employment we've lost you for a little a short minute you want to just sure start back from the yeah yeah from one stop current technical education one stop yeah start from that point because you just were frozen for a moment upon referrals from the one staff and various other entities and self-referrals the following services are offered to eligible participants of the vocational rehabilitation program vocational counseling and guidance training and rehabilitation services to facilitate successful employment outcomes maintenance for additional costs incurred while the individual is receiving VR services transition planning for students enrolled in schools and pre-employment training and services development of an individual plan of employment or an ipe educational informational workshops to persons with disabilities about services which they can access to improve their employment outcomes transportation and travel assistance as related to access to vr services

1:37:47 evaluations accommodations and assistance with job placement transitioning and pre-employment services transitioning services are designed to help students identify career paths and build the requisite skill sets that will facilitate the successful transfer into the workforce or post-secondary education all students who receive special education services have an individualized education program or an IEP the IEP includes information on how students are doing in their classes their annual educational goals and accommodations modifications needed to help students make progress beginning with the first iep meeting the focus is on the student's goals post high school and education and training employment and independent living the dhs vocational rehabilitation counselors are an important part of the iep team which also includes the student his or her parents or guardians their special education teacher general education teachers and a school administrator pre-employment transition services represent the earliest set of services available for students with disabilities under the vocational rehabilitation program the services are available to students as early as age 14 and are short term in nature any student with a documented disability can benefit from these services additionally in accordance with the workforce innovation and opportunity act the vocational rehabilitation program partners with the department of education to provide pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities at least 15 of the program's federal funds are reserved for these services the five required pre-employment transition service categories are job exploration counseling including the career aptitude assessments work-based learning experience which may include in-school or after-school opportunities or experience outside the traditional school setting including internships and on-the-job training that are provided in an integrated environment counseling on opportunities for enrollment for post-secondary education programs at institutions of higher education workplace readiness training to develop soft skills and independent living skills

- 1:40:02 and instruction and self-advocacy which may also include peer mentoring and education relative to available accommodations through the summer months students are engaged excuse me are engaged in employment training or they are placed at various government agencies and private businesses based on their career interest some of the placements are done in collaborations with the virgin islands department of labor students have been offered full-time employment opportunity as a result of their participation in the vr summer employment training program in the past the vr program has partnered with local farmers to provide hands-on training to students in agricultural science. The students learned about land irrigation, soil preparation, seeding germination, and marketing. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the DHS VR program launched our first online pre-employment training series that provided information around our core subject areas. Participating students provided insight on career opportunities, interviewing techniques, resume building, and employer expectations. We're now conducting our spring sessions, which began in February 2021 and will run approximately for 10 weeks. The students will receive a stipend for their participation. Another key component of the VR program is supported employment services. Supported employment is a mandated service that can cater to the severely disabled population that cannot benefit from traditional employment opportunities and requires on-the-job support for a specific amount of time the VR program has struggled to secure and maintain certified and consistent job coaches in the territory the VR program receives a small grant for the provision of these services recently we partner with the local private provider Island Therapy Solutions to provide job development placement and support to selected participants I'm pleased to announce also that
- 1:42:01 we've been in dormant for many years, DHS has successfully reactivated the Randolph Shepard Business Entrepreneurial Program in the territory. The federal Randolph Shepard program signed into law in 1936 by then President Franklin D. Roosevelt is designed to assist talented and creative individuals who are legally blind to acquire management training and business skills necessary to realize the American dream of becoming business owners. On March 1st of this year our vocational rehabilitation staff was proud to see one of their legally blind clients implement a soft opening of the cafe in the rondelugo federal building in st thomas st john district the operated assisted by our vr staff worked diligently to acquire all certifications clearances and licensure required to begin operations she's not only employed but is now a proud business owner dhs encourages the community to support the cafe in the rondelugo federal building we're also excited about the possibilities that would be born from this achievement as the host agency we can work with businesses or government agencies that are interested in providing their customers with on-site food concessions vindi or stack stations this initiative will help to build the economy while providing viable opportunities for virgin islands that are visually impaired currently the vr program assists approximately 300 plus participants territory-wide and averages about 15 or about 52 successful closures per year the program is committed to serving the needs of the population to ensure that persons living with a disability in the territory can lead independent lives one of the major challenges for the program is the lack of training and certification programs available as we evaluate
- 1:43:50 the demand sectors there are not many entry-level positions available and employees are requiring job seekers to have the requisite skill sets this creates a significant gap between what is available in the job market and the employability of the job seekers ongoing education and sensitivity training of private and public sector employers will be a majority priority for the for department of human services it is our hope that increasing our outreach and community education will help to reinforce the goals and missions of the vr program and facilitate inclusive workforce in the territory. We also have our Division of Family Assistance Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, otherwise known as SNAP, the Employment and Training. In accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations CFR Title VII Subtitle B Chapter 2 Subchapter C Part 273 Subpart C 273.7, the Department of Human Services is required to design and operate an employment and training program that consists of case management services and at least one or more or combination of employment and our training components the purpose of the snap ent program is to assist members of the snap households in gaining skills training work or experience that will improve their employment process prospects and reduce their reliance on snap benefits the food and nutrition service provides state agencies with federal grants to fund the administrative costs of an ENT program. ENT grants vary based on the number of work registrants and able-bodied adults without dependents in a state. These grants are called 100% funds and must be used on the planning, implementation, and operation of a state ENT program. 100% of the money cannot be used for
- 1:45:45 any participant reimbursements or support services such as transportation or uniforms vidhs 100 annual grant ranged between 50 and 60 000 dollars in 2016 dhs received a one-time award of 425 000 additional 100 funding and successfully expanded the case management and training programs offered to SNAP recipients. Historically, DHS has operated a mandatory SNAP ENT program and partnered with the Department of Labor to provide case management and employment training components.

- 1:46:23 A mandatory SNAP ENT program requires that as a condition of eligibility, all individuals applying for SNAP benefits who do not meet one of the exemptions were referred to the Department of labor and required to participate in the ENT program. Therefore, recipients who fail to comply with the ENT program requirements without good cause lost their benefits. Currently, DHS is collaborating with our federal partners at FNS, the Northeast Regional Office, or NERO, to successfully switch from a mandatory to voluntary SNAP ENT program. The program redesigning will include the following development of an internal comprehensive case management component and referral process which will be incorporated into the new virgin islands integrated benefits eligibility system revives it'll establish and maintain collaborative relationships with community and government agency stakeholders to guide industry driven service provider agreements designed to increase recipient participation in the program develop and implement a process for collecting and reporting performance measures in accordance with federal regulations. It'll emphasize service delivery to identified target group based upon existing data analysis and of course an annual territory wide SNAP ENT outreach education campaign. The SNAP ENT program includes approximately 5,220 total recipients and it's broken down by 3,020 in St.
- 1:47:55 thomas 570 in st john and 1630 in st croix as part of the overall strategic plan for dhs a creation of an employment and training unit within the division of the family assistance will also combine the supplemental nutrition assistance program employment and training or snap ent and the tanf job opportunity and basic skills jobs program is forthcoming this new unit will enable DHS to maximize available resources and eliminate the duplication of services as we operate both programs in accordance with separate federal guidelines.
- 1:48:36 The Virgin Islands Department of Human Services Division of Family Assistance also administers the Federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, TANF, Employment and Training, currently known as the JOBS program. The JOBS program provides services to TANF recipients by moving them from dependency to self-sufficiency in preparation for work. On July 1, 1997, the Virgin Islands joined the rest of the nation in the reform of welfare. Federal law required all TANF recipients to participate in work or work activities after two years of assistance.
- 1:49:13 Failure to comply will result in a financial penancy for the territory. The federal law limits financial assistance to lifetime limit of a 60-month period. The main goal of the jobs program is to provide services which would enable TANF recipients to become economically self-sufficient by identifying and facilitating unique opportunities for their recipients to acquire work. This is done through forging public and private sector partnerships with government and non-profit agencies and private businesses to increase the number of individuals entering the workforce. Our key performance measure is for TANF recipients to obtain and retain employment prior to their expiration of their lifetime limit of 60 TANF months unless a recipient is granted a waiver for three months transitional employment or extreme family violence. Eligible applicants must be 16 years or older. The federal lifetime limit of TANF benefits is 60 months or five years. As of 2002, there is a 50% federal minimum caseload requirement of recipients to be in a work activity each year. All TANF recipients must participate in a work activity except for the following conditions for TANF recipients heads of household who are in their third trimester of their pregnancy, have a child under six months old, have a child under six years old and does not have child care or are caring for a child with a disability. The federal government requires all TANF recipients to participate in a work activity unless the recipient is exempted or waived. To qualify with federal regulations, a work activity must be 30 hours per week or longer except for job readiness components. the work activities are as follows unsubsidized employment subsidized private sector employment
- 1:51:10 subsidized public sector employment work experience is also any knowledge enhancing or skill enhancing services provided to an employer by a customer in exchange for training needed to make that customer more marketable for three months with a legitimate job vacancy during which time they are rigorously evaluated upon satisfactory completion the employer is strongly encouraged to hire that participant it should also be noted that the initial american recovery and reinvestment act federal funding the department of human services other virgin islands government agencies and private non-profit agencies participated in a subsidized public sector and private public sector employment work experience with jobs where over 20 jobs participants were placed in departments and agencies many of these participants were able to obtain permanent employment after and gain valuable work experience dhs will be moving forward in the near future with other subsidized employment work experience for our jobs participants on the job training which is any knowledge or skill enhancing service provided to an employer by a customer as a precondition of hire and or a post hire basis to ensure the recipient is guaranteed employment the department of human services jobs program has partnered with the department of labor workforce and development opportunity act for recipients to take advantage of the training opportunities the department of labor will also offer a work opportunity tax credit to employers who meet the eligibility requirements for hiring vocational rehabilitation clients Education directly related to employment for individuals with no high school diploma or certificate of high school equivalency is theoretical and or practical

- 1:52:57 instruction provided to a recipient to assist said recipient obtain the necessary knowledge and or skills for those employment. Unless exempt the recipient must be enrolled in a school component within the next 24 months of an enrollment in the program based on need. Satisfactory school attendance for individuals with no high school diploma or certificate or high school equivalency is academic instruction intended to assist a customer obtained a high school diploma or certificate or high school equivalency. Other approved TANF employment work activities include job search and pre-employment assistance, community service and nonprofits and government agencies, career technical or vocational educational training in general, theoretical and or practical instructions provided to a customer in a particular skill or discipline that would help the customer become more marketable. DHS will be moving forward with a redesigned and re-energized action plan for our jobs participants in 2021 in career technical training with an emphasis on high demand jobs in our territory. The Department of Human Services TANF jobs program will undergo a redesigned active recruitment and will be renamed in 2021. It has been almost 25 years since the welfare reform transformed the way the federal government operated cash assistance programs to low-income and indigent families. The University of the Virgin Islands Caribbean Exploratory Research Center on Health Disparities completed a research project focused on the Virgin Islands TANF employment and training program. The research will serve as the catalyst for improving our DHS, TANF employment and training program as we move forward in assisting our TANF clients to not only get a job but also take the necessary steps on a career pathway and qualify for higher paying jobs and more stable jobs in careers to achieve self-sufficiencies for themselves and their families. One last division
- 1:54:56 we have regarding this is the Division of Senior Citizen Affairs and it's in the Division of Senior Citizen Affairs is the U.S. Department of Labor a grantee of the Senior Community Service Employment Program or CSEP. CSEP is a community service and work-based training program for older workers who are 55 years of age and older, unemployed, and have a family income of no more than 125 percent of the federal poverty level. It was first unauthorized under Title II of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 and funded in 1965 as a part of the demonstration project called operation mainstream but later transitioned to an established program under the older americans act in 1978 it was redesignated under title five of the older americans act and this is the still statutory author authorization of the program today cseps has operated in the virgin islands for over 35 years csep enrollees gain employee gain work experience in a variety of community service activities in a non-profit and public entities including but not limited schools, hospitals, child care programs, and senior centers. They work an average of 20 hours a week and are paid at the highest or federal, state, or local minimum wages. The Virgin Island CSEP enrollees earn \$10.50 per hour. Their community service training and subsidized employment services as a bridge to unsubsidized employment opportunities while enrolled in csep seniors receive personalized help in meeting employment goals which prepare them to enter or re-enter the job market our priority group group for the program enrollment is given to veterans and their eligible spouses if their discharge was not dishonorable the second priority group for csep is given to individuals with at least one of the following characteristics. They're 65 or older, have limited
- 1:57:01 English skills, have low reading, writing, and math skills, live in a rural area, they need extra support and training to secure employment, did not get a job after receiving employment services from an American Job Center, or are homeless or risk of being homeless. CSEP enrollees are experienced, responsible qualified and talented and as we often share with our employees in the wider public when speaking about csep age is an asset experience of benefit hire a senior worker today this concludes my presentation i would like to personally thank our department of human services team of professionals who've been on the front lines providing direct services to our virgin islands community throughout the whole covet 19 pandemic as always dhs is committing to work into myth together to make a difference it's been my pleasure to provide you with the information on just a few of our programs and services offered under the virgin islands department of human services umbrella my team and i are available to answer any questions you may have specifically regarding our testimony today thank you very much commissioner gomez causey gomez thank you very much for your testimony and i just would like to um again to the listeners and viewers because i'm also tracking of course commentary that's important as we move forward because as we engage the public we want to make sure we're all aligned on the first block once again we have revised the agenda which was sent out through the social media channel for the um for the legislature legvi.org Again, for those members of the public, I encourage you to go to ledgevi.org, click on committees, go into the subfolder for today's hearing, which is March 15th.
- 1:58:46 Also, if you're on social media, under my Facebook page, Senator Genevieve Whitaker, I even went ahead and created a short link. So you can click on that bit.ly link. It's a short link that will take you also there. The issue for the Block 1 and the agenda for Block 1 concerned unemployment in all its forms from the perspective of the CARES Act and the COVID virus rather and to all the different unemployment services. Commissioner Gary Malloy, again as I placed on the record earlier for those who may just be joining, indicated that he did not need to testify because he testified to these items already and it is my position as well I'm sure of the position of all of most if not most of all and all my colleagues that we

have jurisdiction areas and again in exercising oversight over the requisite agency that falls under our committee of jurisdiction it is important for us to hear from those commissions and directors by way of transparency as we break down the information and we go through this process for hearings and the work that is done before then I want to continue to thank those for the block two who agreed to testify earlier and adjusting their schedules will now move on to our second testifier dr. Michael Francois who is the chairman of the Virgin Islands Board of Career and Technical Education at this time dr. Francois and I'll first read the oath of office to you. Media if you wouldn't go ahead and feature Dr. Francois. Spotlight him.

2:00:36 Oh, we're gonna hear you but we can't see you. There you are. Yes, you've been off for a while. Thank you so much. So Dr. Francois at this time please raise your right hand do you solemnly affirm under penalty of perjury that the testimony you give to this committee will be the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth to the best of your knowledge and belief I do thank you very much dr. Francois you may proceed good afternoon honorable senator Jennifer Whitaker members of the Committee on Education and Workforce Development and other members of the 34th Legislature of the Virgin Islands, fellow testifiers, and members of the viewing and listening audience.

2:01:26 The Virgin Islands Board of Career and Technical Education members, thank you for the opportunity to testify before our committee. My name is Dr. Michael T. Francois, Board Chair. Joining me here today is Board Executive Director Antone Deuce. Critical to our mission as board members of the Virgin Islands Board of Career and Technical Education is the mandate that employability skills, both academic and technical, be provided by all students in the Virgin Islands, sorry, be provided to all students in the Virgin Islands regardless of whether the goal is to attend college or enter the workforce directly after high school. Today's testimony will include the status of career and technical education programs, an outline of the CTE curriculum, and an overview of the teacher certification process. Recently, the Virgin Islands Board of Career technical education had an opportunity to visit the CTE classrooms, both on St. Croix and St. Thomas. Our conclusion of the talk was that CTE classrooms in the territory lack basic upkeep, to say the least.

2:02:49 On St. Croix, the Central High School, Braden and Neal Technician class has resumed classroom learning. However, the classroom leaves much to be desired. classroom on our visit had exposed stripped wiring, leaks, and a lack of basic maintenance. Furthermore, the equipment in the classroom was outdated. Both the environment and equipment placed our students at a learning disadvantage while being subjected to health and safety hazards. The Career and Technical Center has nine programs that resumed classroom learning. Although the classrooms at CTEC are in workable condition, they are also in need of basic upkeep. For example, there are missing ceiling tiles, leaks, and outdated equipment. On St. Thomas, the situation was worse. If I had to describe the St. Thomas CT classroom in one word, that word would be deplorable. At the Charlotte Amali High School, we found classrooms that consistently flooded, a culinary lab missing basic sanitary requirements set by the Department of health and buildings with mold in plain sight. The bottom line is such an environment is unsafe and unhealthy for our students. Why after years and millions in federal funding this has not been remedied is baffling, especially when modular units for academic teaching have been provided. several years ago the virgin islands board of korean technical education suggested in just such a hearing legislation that would move funding from department of education the virgin islands

2:04:53 board of korean technical education for ct classrooms upkeep it also bears mentioning that the virgin island's board of career and technical education by law bi code title 17 chapter 26 sub chapter 26 allows us to hire instructors and determine salaries instructor position in the testimony um we give me a minute Regarding the CTE curriculum, Career and Technical Education is a program of study that prepares Virgin Islands students for real world knowledge, college and career through a multi-year sequence of courses that integrate both core academics with technical skills within a career path. Many CTE courses are offered in both territorial districts resulting in national certification such as National Center for Construction Education and Research, NCCR, and National Academic Foundation . Virgin Islands Board of Career Technical Education is tasked with the review and approval of curricula for 16 career clusters. Exposure to these clusters include careers students may not be familiar with or may not even ever have considered while will produce the next generation of leaders and entrepreneurs in the Virgin Islands. CTE allows students to figure out what they are passionate about, what they love to do and what they would like to try. CT gives learners or gives a learning boost. It combines regular academic courses curricula with career focused courses, skill building, mentoring and on-the-job training with real life

2:07:06 experience through interpreneur internship. This experience helps students build confidence and leadership skills to meet their goals in and out of the classroom ct programs provide information on various post-secondary options available in the community territory or overseas when young people develop valuable skills make connections and build a network while they are in high school, they have an inside track to a successful career. A little bit about the teacher certification. Teacher certification, what the board has done, the first step for a teacher to be certified is an individual getting certified

by the board is to determine his or her eligibility, whether they're eligible to be certified. The individual should have a bachelor's or of arts degree or bachelor's of science degree trade certificate or apprenticeship in their field this requirement is set by the virgin islands board of education and enforced by the virgin island department of education through the division of personnel it is preferred if the individual is pre-qualified by hr and the department of education but it is not required. Second, the candidate must complete the Virgin Islands Board of Korean Technical Education application. They must provide proof of citizenship and education with supporting documents, certificates, transcripts, and other proof to support qualifications. If the application is applying, if the applicant, sorry, is applying for a renewal of certification, they should include any additional coursework completed as part of the education requirement. The individual can complete the first two steps by visiting our offices on St. Thomas and St. Croix or online at www.victeb.org. Once the office receives the application and supporting documents they are reviewed by the office staff sorted labeled for priority and loaded to the cloud if requirements are met the certification committee members individually review the candidates information as soon as they are available the applicants are further analyzed at the teacher certification meeting which occurs monthly the team then decides as to certification eligibility instructors are prioritized by first-time applicants renewals of temporary or provisional certificates and renewal of expired certificates presently on st croix there are 30 instructors certified and 26 not certified on st thomas there there are 17 certified with 41 not certified. This is a total of 47 certified CT instructors and 67 not certified in the territory. 41% certified, 59% not certified. 21 of the 67 not certified had their instructor certification expired in December 2020. Approximately 10 of the 21 are on hold for additional information and the rest are being notified of their status and hopefully will respond and complete the application for certification. This board has certified 35 instructors so far, and we are also in the process of certifying the Reserve Officers Training Corps, ROTC instructors in the territory. We are actively exploring ways to improve the teacher credentialing process, including establishing an automatic instructor notification system to ensure certification does not lapse. Virgin Islands Port of Korean Technical Education is in the process of developing a protocol for certifying licensed constructors, as well as being a conversion, sorry, as well as being in conversation with agencies,

2:11:39 partners to improve accountability and ensure students have optimal instructional experiences. Madam Chair, this concludes my testimony. Thank you for allowing the CTE board the opportunity to testify and we are prepared to answer your questions. Thank you, Dr. Francois. Can you also please place on the record the meetings of the CTEK board, how often are there? And to point out the regular nature of the CTEK board meetings for the purpose of the public, especially those who are tuned in, who follow us on social media, who are engaged, and please provide that information.

2:12:16 Yes, ma'am. The city board, we meet on the third Wednesday of every month at between 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. Sometimes we may go a little over based on the presenters that we have on that day. But during that meeting, we have our committees, different committees give a report on what they did at their monthly committee meetings. We usually have presenters that bring new ideas about things we could do in the territory when it comes to CTE. And our executive director also takes that time to give his monthly report.

2:13:00 Thank you. Thank you, and to the benefit of the public, this is one board in particular has regular meetings so that us as senators and you as even members of the public can attend and put that on your calendar and attend on a regular basis and that's beneficial as we work on towards reform efforts thank you very much dr francois dr susan mcgrasse for uv iso we'll be with you and first on and start off also with the oath of office dr mcgrasse thank you very much dr francois um okay good morning to everyone first let's um put you up as the spotlight and then we're going to do the oath and then we will begin okay okay dr mcgrass do you please raise your right hand do you solemnly affirm under a penalty perjury that the testimony you will give to this committee will be the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth to the best of your knowledge and belief i do thank you very much you may proceed dr mcgrass your testimony thank you so much and good morning to all i am joined today by my team member dr wendy corum vla she is the ubi cell community engagement manager and director center for the study of spirituality and professionalism so good morning honorable chair Genevieve Whitaker members of the committee on education workforce development other members of the 34th legislature to the viewing and listening audience my name is dr suzanne daryl mcgross and i serve as the director for the university of the virgin islands center for excellence in leadership and learning

2:14:45 uvi cell this testimony includes an overview of uvi cell including information on courses programs, and our admissions policy. UVI-Cell was established in 2002 to meet the workforce and professional development training needs critical to the economic prosperity of the Virgin Islands and surrounding Caribbean islands. For nearly 20 years, UVI-Cell has provided continuing education and training opportunities and has served as a bridge to the university. We are accredited through the International Association for Continuing Education and Training , and can award continuing education units or CEUs for coursework. We are also an accredited American Heart Association, AHA International Training Center. Over the past two years, UVicel has evolved through a change in reporting under the president's office and leadership by Dr. Haldane Davies, VP of Business Development and Innovation. Mergers with the Institute for Leadership and

Organizational Effectiveness, ILO, and the Center for the Study of Spirituality and Professionalism allowed us to increase quality training and community engagement services. We also expanded our capabilities in consulting, contracting, and professional services. There are 10 cell staff members between the two UVI campuses. At the Orville E. Ken campus on St. Thomas, we are located at Faculty East. On the St. Croix Albert E. Sheen campus, we have an office on campus and a satellite office in Frederickstead.

2:16:13 UVI CELL aims to be self-sufficient and generates revenue through consultancies and grants, student tuition, assessment fees, and legislative funding. We also receive funding through the Veterans Office as all CELL courses are free for veterans and through charitable donations. We work with government agencies to deliver education and strategic planning solutions, and our open enrollment continuing education courses are available online and in person. Individuals may subscribe to notifications or follow our Facebook page for updates.

2:16:47 Current offerings are posted on our website, www.cell.ubi.edu, along with our admissions and enrollment policies. And that page is cell.ubi.edu forward slash courses forward slash policies. We are guided by the university's policy manual and primarily serve adults. Potential students may contact us directly for enrollment support. current courses include grant writing and grant management conflict management mediation training and our anti-money laundering and financial crime series among others we are working to expand offerings in culinary arts construction management cloud computing cyber security cyber security marine maritime training agriculture and aviation and align with middle and high schools on curriculum and workforce development pathways our assessment services include administration of the uvi entrance exam pan testing for the transportation security administration that's tsa and u.s customs and border protection for metric testing where we can provide the ggpr praxis the ged and human resource certification and psi for vi licensure tests including assessments for plumbers electricians real estate agents cosmetologists barbers and others through our occupational safety and health administration osha safety and paradise consultation program we offer free confidential safety and health services to small businesses and partner with the small business development center the sbdc and the vi economic development authority the vieda in carrying out many tasks related to the economic growth and stability of the territory our program has been visible and offering COVID-19 related webinars and training sessions. To request an OSHA consultation visit, please go to safety.ubi.edu. Notable partnerships include the Division of Personnel

2:18:48 for the Certified Public Manager Program, the VI Fire Service for Emergency Medical Responder Training, and the VI Bureau of Corrections where we provide strategic planning, education, and and re-entry planning services. In the re-entry space, we also engage with the Department of Labor, the Workforce Board, the Department of Human Services, the Youth and Rehabilitation Center, YRC, the Department of Education, the Department of Justice, the Law Enforcement Planning Commission, and community and faith-based organizations. We actively work with law enforcement partners to support public safety, the rehabilitation of inmates, the reduction of recidivism and reductions in serious and violent crime. In 2019, under the leadership of CSAP director, Dr. Wendy Corm, VLA, we hosted the nonprofit violence prevention summit and assisted in writing the bill that is now law to establish the office of gun violence prevention. In collaboration with the VI department of education, we support the Man Up Academy and junior university programs.

2:19:53 These are programs for middle and high schoolers and are launching a new initiative with Rotary International Building Peace Through Service, which will provide monthly virtual student workshops. We also partner with the Attorney General's Office and the VI Police Department on Project Safe Neighborhood Research. Other community engagement efforts include our active involvement with the Children and Youth Task Force in conjunction with our CYTF leadership, Dr. Celia Victor, she's with the Bureau of Corrections, and Dr. Greg Wonnell from UBI. UVI Cell hosts bi-weekly virtual meetings where the emphasis is on the complex needs of children, youth and their families, pre and post disaster, including the impacts of COVID-19. We support training on resiliency, disaster preparedness and trauma informed methods to cope with stress.

2:20:42 Upcoming sessions include human trafficking training. Under the leadership of Dr. Haldane Davies, recent consulting, contracting and professional services include awards through the government Virgin Islands Office of Management and Budget, OMB, to develop the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, SEDS, and the Tourism Master Plan for the Territory. We also engage in strategic planning and feasibility studies, including work with the Government Employees Retirement System, GERS, and the USVI Economic Development Authority. In the coming year, we will work to further engage with our agency and community partners, identify strategic collaborative opportunities and engage in innovative evidence-based grant writing and grant management efforts uvi cell belongs to the community we encourage all to engage with us and let us know how we can provide support i thank you for the opportunity to testify before this committee and welcome any questions you may have thank you very much dr mcgross thank you and there's some questions as to to the block 2 and as the nature of what's taking place for those who may not may or may not be aware what is what is taking place is an effort to restructure our entire career and education system the board members of

the CTECH board as presented during the February 12th hearing provided laid the foundation as the role of the CTECH Board. Dr. McGrath was also present during that hearing and so there are collaborative efforts going on because as we sit here and as we engage, there are issues surrounding funding.

- 2 : 22 : 24 One of the questions before we begin our round of questioning, I want to put out there that we have a lot of funding that is out there. In the case of a workforce development, on the community development block grant disaster recovery fund as shown as cdbg dr there's also committee development block grants for mitigation under mit cdbg mit for disaster recovery to the tune of 10 million dollars the virginal housing finance authority board awarded the workforce development board 10 million dollars for those who are especially following the money and following the budgets the current education board is a board that which i will ask dr francois what is the current budget level but i'm the the awareness is that the board has put in a budget of 500 000 and i will be confirming with dr francois the exact number and so when we talk about the sharing of funds going around there's issues with resources i want to thank the ctech board for the leadership because it is in the what's in the third week of January that's the third week of January the CTECH board led the effort for the school reopening in us going and conducting the site visits to the second year CTECH classrooms in both districts which I joined them as a committee chairwoman along with committee members and non committee members so the state of our schools is of great importance and outside of the hearings process there are series of efforts being made to be brought out to the public so that the
- 2 : 24 : 14 public is going to be part of us being part of transforming the system the system is largely broken as we all are aware but in order to fix it we have to analyze placed also if you listen to the testimony for each individual there There are entities that are collaborating. In order for us to proceed, there must be critical collaboration efforts. To Commissioner Kazi-Gomez for the Vocational Rehabilitation Program, it is going to be now up to your department to work with the CTEC Board, with the Workforce Development Board to achieve some of these goals. Because what is happening by way of workforce development, there's a lot of, and that's over time a lot of silo behavior not to the fault necessarily of anyone in particular but over time so today's hearing as we delve out workforce development we're addressing it bit by bit the virginal's department education also has an entity within the department that deals with career and technical education that is known as the state office of career and technical education that is a current state and that's the current infrastructure we have to step back and analyze has that been working and so as we move forward and we assess and analyze and do the work necessary to reform our career and technical education system so to that end i want to start off we're going to move into seven minute rounds and be um before getting into one final note and getting into the rounds what I will let the public also know is that we're gonna have of course upcoming hearings one of the other areas of focus is on curriculum the test of both Dr. Francois and Dr. McGrath touched on curriculum and we'll be dealing with that as well so thank you very much so in the order of I'm gonna first recognize Senator Potter and I recognize you for your seven minutes. You may proceed. Senator. Thank you very much, Madam chair. Good
- 2 : 26 : 31 morning everyone. Morning testifiers and colleagues. My first question really goes to Dr. Francois and I'm going to make a statement before asking the question. I'm very, very disappointed over the years to see what I see as the systematic gutting of our career and technical education programs in the territory. I know a number of persons in our community who got their start from a career standpoint by going through some of the various programs in our schools and that is not happening today and I think it is it is sad. I think Dr. Francois's statement about the physical state of physical plants at the you know the various career classrooms, he said that he would characterize the condition on St.
- 2 : 27 : 23 Thomas as nothing short of deplorable, and it just broke my heart when you mentioned that Dr. Francois. The question to you is, given the realities of the state of the physical plant, and it's hard to get anything done when the condition of the physical plant is deplorable, what has the conversation been with the Department of Education regarding the upkeep, repair, maintenance of the physical classrooms where learning has to take place? Good day, Senator. We've been trying to communicate the importance of having a CT classrooms ready and prepared going back and forth with the Department of Education and I get the impression that they're doing the best they can but it's almost like they don't have full control of maintenance I understand that in some cases they're not allowed to do any temporary work because of federal monies situation however that's the situation we're in it's almost this board would like to somehow take control of of getting those things done however we don't have control we have to go through the department of education and in in a lot of cases the department of education is dependent on maintenance or the maintenance department or or finances to to get those um classrooms fixed but in in a lot of cases though i know a lot of people will say is it's it's the last two hurricanes and so forth but in a lot of cases a lot of these classrooms were in similar states before the hurricane it's it's almost like it's a neglect of cte that's how i feel personally and i think you might be hitting the nail on the head it is the commitment and the belief that there is a benefit in having these career and technical training opportunities for young people if you don't believe in it um it's difficult to support it and i um it saddens me to think that that would be that would be the case My next question, Dr. Francois, and you mentioned in your presentation that CTE is by law charged with setting instructor

salaries, and I didn't know that that was the case, so thanks for that information. Now, with that power, do you have or what has CTE done with regard to developing job specifications and salary scales for critically needed instructor position how has that been working out well senator to be frank when the members of this board came up the

2:30:55 members you have right now came on board it's almost like the city board was gutted or they gave up their responsibility and somehow the board has lost its authority to make those type of decisions we're fighting that right now we're back and forth talking to the Department of Education I've had meetings with the with the teachers union about about salaries for for for city instructors however most of the hiring of city instructors is done by the Department of Education with no input at all from this board except for certifying except for certifying the teachers as they come on board making sure they're certified CTE teachers but as far as salary and so forth we we're fighting that right now to get some sort of input on that if not based on the law the full input is like the law states at least some sort of input okay I think that as the subject matter experts and as the board that is charged with those types of responsibilities, you must have a role, you must have a seat at the table to develop those salaries. That is a part of why, to the best of my knowledge, you're having some major challenges finding qualified persons, you know, to serve as instructors because of the salaries. And I'm wondering whether or not there is an option to bring persons on contract rather than necessarily bringing persons in as full-fledged government employees with benefits and the like, which could add to a much more costly situation.

2:33:00 But I'm going to leave it at that for now and ask a couple of questions to Commissioner Kazi-Gomez regarding the vocational voc rehab program and I mean Commissioner what is every student in the territories public schools who are in special ed are they all automatically connected with the voc rehab program how does that work I would like our Administrator Shari agreeing to answer since she does she's on the front lines with that okay certainly good morning can you hear me okay certainly our evoke rehab counselors are invited to the iep meetings on a regular basis they attend meetings as they are requested so basically each student that comes through the public school system that has an iep we are invited to those meetings the referrals come to the department of education Okay. Just one more question, Madam Chair. I won't abuse my time. I think you mentioned Commissioner Gomez in your testimony that 52 persons had successfully, there were 52 successful closures per year with regard to the voc rehab program. And I just wanted to know what constituted a closure how does that look i'll have miss green to continue she's done great okay as it pertains to the successful closures once an individual has attained competitive employment or gainful employment if you will that would constitute a successful closure having received training and the different types of services that the program provides if they're

2:35:21 able to attain employment, we are able to then close it out as a successful closure. The counselors still have to maintain contact with that individual for at least six quarters after the closure, but we can indicate it on our report that it is successful. Okay. Thank you very much. My final question regarding the struggles to secure and maintain certified and consistent job coaches in the territory. I wanted to know whether or not, what sort of certification, you know, is entailed? Certified by whom? Have you had any opportunities to touch bases with retirees of the GVI or UVI personnel? how does a certified job coach look it's it is usually done on the university level job coaches are certified through the university and this is a discussion that we would have to have with our local university to see if that's something that we can definitely implement job coaches we've had over the years have come to us indicating their interest and we've worked with them but they have not been certified so this is an area that we definitely need to work on and again discussions are being had around this topic thank you very much thank you very much madam chair for the extra time thank you um before we proceed with the my next colleague i want to put on the record there were there were two other testifiers who are absent and sent in excuse letters madam clerk please read in the first the two letters

2:37:22 the virgin islands of the united states workforce development board 4401 cyan farm christian said vi 00820 march 11 2021 honorable genevieve whitaker legislative secretary 34th legislature of the virgin islands 3022 estate golden rock christian stead vi 00820 dear senator whitaker i am in receipt of your invitation to appear before the committee on education and workforce development on monday march 15 2021 taking into consideration the importance of providing you and the members of the 34th legislature with updates on the activities and projects currently being undertaken by the vi workforce development board and our most recent appearance before the committee i respectfully request another day to appear before your committee the board has several initiatives in the pipeline and require additional time to finalize a few key ones this will give us the opportunity to be more detailed in our presentation to you thank you for your consideration respectfully michael carty chairman vi state workforce development board before you read the next letter just to be clear on the process that's involved the and just to highlight something that's really important the workforce development board is at the center of workforce development and while it's understandable that people have to collect themselves to get information there is a board of 27 people that the governor the Virgin Islands has appointed and if you can tell me that in the in all this is going on with the disaster recovery and the fact that this board

- 2:39:14 is you know has ten million dollars to use for workforce development and other boards and entities in need of funds that also put in the record that the Department of Human Service for the vocational rehab number the programs require federal matches so to again to highlight a problem we have we have a situation where persons who have the responsibility to execute are falling behind it is the goal of this committee to exercise jurisdiction and to also give an opportunity i will also put on the record that it's also been placed on the record again that the one of the contracts that the workforce development board executed was already awarded in february and for all those who know what it takes to go through the procurement process there's a lot of negotiations that go on beforehand and this will be the first time i've ever learning that a executed contract that post contract you're negotiating on terms there are some issues i will also highlight that i would suggest that the departments under the jurisdiction of workforce development to start to have the collaborative meetings you can use various boards who are developing models of engagement models meaning they are doing the collaboration join them work with them and get the work done the so we have to start to do that i'm hearing um different items placed on the agenda today because we're not meeting it's for the staff to attend the commission to attend make it possible that the discussions are not just discussions but we're into work sessions and we're getting the work done so to the icf corporation you're indicating that
- 2:41:09 you need more time just know that this is this is not not the last and that we're going to continue to be on top of you to get this information and through investigation and exercising oversight that's a commitment that i have and i know that my other colleagues support that some of them support that as well we'll move now on to senator joseph for your seven minutes of questioning thank you and fine and we also now read um mr um mr mulepski's letter into the record thank you and then senator joseph okay march 9th 2021 icf letter of excuse invitation to testify the committee on education and workforce development hearing 3 15 21. good day senator whitaker thank you for the invitation to testify before the committee on education and workforce development on march 15 2021 it's our understanding that the virgin islands department of labor has competitively awarded icf incorporated llc icf the contract for the skills for today project however contract negotiations are still underway after the contract is finalized and fully executed icf welcomes the opportunity to support vi department of labor leadership and their testimony before the committee on vitals skills for today project therefore after consultation with commissioner gary malloy of the vi the vi Department of Labor, we respectfully request rescheduling the presentation for later this spring. Should you have any questions or clarifications about skills for today, we respectfully defer to Virgin Islands Department of Labor, Commissioner Malloy, sincerely Bernard J. Milewski, Senior Contracts administrator. Senator Joseph you may proceed with your seven minutes. Thank
- 2:43:29 you madam chair a pleasant good morning to the listening audience my colleagues our testifiers, as well as our viewing audience. I trust that everyone is doing well. I wanted to first of all thank all the testifiers who agreed with the shift in the time and was able to accommodate us. We are deeply appreciative of your time and also of your teamwork and your team spirit in making that shift given the short notice. I wanted to start off my questioning this morning and it will be first directed to our Commissioner of the Department of Human Services Miss Kimberly Kasi Gomez. Miss Gomez I really did a wonderful job with your presentation but there are some items that I do have some questions relative too, and I'm more so into the statistical information, so I'm just going to read it off to you what I'm looking at and looking for.
- 2:44:40 For the Division of Disabilities and Rehabilitation Services, what is the cognizant U.S. Department that you receive the funding from, and what amount is that? Assistant Commissioner Rimer Brown has all the fiscal information in front of her, I believe. AC Rimer Brown? Yes, the vocational rehab program, they receive funding through the Department of Education.
- 2:45:13 The grant funding, anywhere between \$1.8 to \$2 million per year. Okay. And how many, how much have you already expended or, or have you asked for extension given our pandemic? Well, for the pandemic and by the rules of the vocational rehab program, we do have an additional year which we can use the funding. So although the grant is awarded in one year, you can expend in a second fiscal year.
- 2:45:53 So for example, FY20 funding, we still had access in FY21. So if there's any unexpended, and especially because of the pandemic, the activities may be reduced, we do have that second fiscal year to expend our federal funding from the Department of Education. Do you have a performance period for your grant? Yes, it would be that period once they gave you that second year.
- 2:46:23 It's two full calendar FY fiscal years, and then you have the usual 90-day period to liquidate funding. Thank you kindly. Now, let's get into the meat of the operation of the vocational rehabilitation services. I noted in the testimony there was a reference to the Individual Education Program. What is an Individual Education Program? So an Individualized Education Plan is developed within the Department of Education for students with disabilities.

- 2:47:02 So it's not a... One moment, please, Commissioner. It's not a program. It's actually the plan, correct? Yes. It must have been my mistake. It's an IEP, so Individualized Education Plan, not program. My apologies. No worries. I understand. I just wanted to make sure we're clear on the record. Now, when you take into consideration, how many students are currently enrolled in the Vocational Disabilities and Rehabilitation Services? How many are currently enrolled? Ms. Green.
- 2:47:38 Majority of our populations are students, so I would say anywhere from 70% to 75% are students. I'm sorry, would you just give me the numbers, the numbers? How many are currently enrolled? How many are students? How many are adults? Break it down for me and then try to break it down for me by district. I don't know if you have that statistical data available.
- 2:48:10 No, I do not. I can definitely provide that information. I can do the district breakdown, but I cannot indicate which ones are students and which ones are adults at this time. Well, how is it that you can't distinguish it when you have individual education plans that are coming from the Department of Education? Those individual education plan also extends when they graduate from high school? It's not that we cannot distinguish it, it's just that I don't have that information readily available at this time.
- 2:48:45 But we can definitely provide that information to you. Okay, beautiful. Madam Chair, are we noting that I'm requesting that information? Thank you kindly. So do you have, with that information, do you have a round figure of how many individuals currently enrolled in this program? In the VR program? Yes, ma'am. On a whole, on a whole, yes, we do. And what is that number? 315 students. 315? 315. Okay, 315. I said students, I'm sorry, participants. I meant participants, I'm sorry. Understood, understood, I understood. Yes. Thank you kindly yes okay you have 315 participants that are currently enrolled in all of the four and that's the total four programs you offer correct no no no just we have the older blind program and we have the randall shepherd program those do not apply this is basically the vr program okay well break it down for me the numbers that are totally enrolled in each one of the program under your leadership the number of persons enrolled in the programs right now do you have okay once again that no that that statistical information is not readily available but i can definitely provide that to you beautiful thank you kindly um a point of clarification is it for fiscal year 21 or is it for 2020 or overall um what grant are you currently operating under i'm sorry madam yes you represent what current what current grant year are you performing under we're actually performing under the fy 2020 and also the fy 21.
- 2:50:45 So, provide the information for both years, because you also have programmatic enrollment baselines and indicators that you must meet with your funding source? Correct. And also provide for us your performance measures that you have met or have not met in the areas that you are having challenges. I'm saying all of this, I don't want anyone to leave with a sense that we are trying to be critical, but we want to get the information, the data, because it helps build our case relative to braiding and supporting and the collaboration, because you need significant collaboration to deal which your area and if we can be of assistance and advocate for that based on the number of persons you have enrolled in your program we all from the executive to the legislative even to the judicial and the private sector we should be saying that because you need significant supports and that's what it is about so provide us the statistical data for us please thank you certainly Madam Chair, I wasn't finished, are we going to have another round? Yes, we will. Okay, may I continue my- That's your last question and then we'll be back for another round. Okay, now I wanted to move on, thank you kindly Madam Chair for your leeway and your indulgence. I wanted to move on to asking some questions relative to, let's see, This is on page 8 of the testimony, Commissioner, relative to the program, it would be line 143, your major challenges.
- 2:52:51 You said in your testimony, one of the major challenges for the program is the lack of training and certification programs available. So kindly indicate the type of training based on your assessments your clients are interested in. What are those areas that your clients have found that they are passionate? This is going to be where they want to have their career going forward. So tell us if you've done assessments, what are you seeing are some of the top three career pathways that your clients are are interested in the screen top to the top three I just as a prerequisite thanks for the question Senator well I think one of the things too is like the interest is there but it's not always the ability to have that as a career too and so i think that the reality is that we need to make sure that the reality is as available to you but miss green what do you think the top three um of your clients their interests are what i would say is that as we analyze the workforce and the needs for the clientele uh there hasn't been a lot of vocational trade programs available to the to the clients um i know in the past we used to have a more robust uh training curriculum however recently that has changed areas like cna plumbing electricity those are areas i think hvac it there are a lot of areas that we don't have training in and as we move forward we definitely need to consider um these type of programs we have even heavy equipment crane operators these type of positions that would then allow our clients to be employed by hovenza or should i say line tree these different entities that they are seeking employment they don't have the requisite skills to then be able to acquire these jobs may i ask uh madam

i know just in respect of time because um we're gonna have another round if you want to just close off but this is a key follow-up i

2:55:14 may i ask thank you kindly just be just so kind thank you thank you uh commissioner cossey gomez do you have representation or from the department of human services on the workforce development board who is the representative um it's myself actually and have you communicated this to the workforce development board regarding this thing yeah go ahead sharia okay thank you okay i just wanted to add that yes commissioner gomez is on the board but i too serve on that board and we have had discussions with our core partners regarding the need for these trainings yes Thank you, Senator Joseph. Before I proceed to my next colleague, we also have to put in the record that the board hasn't met in several months. Okay, so one of the things we have to be, if we're gonna deal with this issue, we have to be honest. That's how you reform a system. Let's be frank and let's be honest.

2:56:18 Let's be honest with the public. The board is not meeting and the board needs to meet because the only way you can get to these things and these items is to meet, vet, and do the work necessary to get this achieved. The Workforce Development Plan was put out, and so these objectives and these information should have been worked into the plan, but a plan is just on the piece of paper, it will mean nothing unless we have a plan of action. And so I would really ask, I'm asking each person, each stakeholder, the commissioner and her leadership team, I already am aware that the CTECH board is collaborative, so I don't have to ask Dr. Francois to do that because that's what the board is doing. UVI Cell, Dr. McGrath, she's a champion collaborator, I would add to that, and so let's meet, vet, and work on these issues. Senators, I think I see Senator Saru.

2:57:15 I recognize Senator Saru for your seven minutes. Hello. Morning Madam Chair. Good morning to all. Is this the morning? No afternoon. Afternoon to all. Commissioner Kazi-Gomez where are you on the use of VEVIS? Hi. Good afternoon. Good morning. So good afternoon. On the use of what? I didn't quite hear that. VIVIS. AC Rhymer Brown that's yours.

2:57:51 Yes. VIVIS. Unfortunately in the last couple of years I know there was some action but I was disappointed upon returning to the government. It is not has not been very very active. I am not even aware I know the Department of Education but with as far as the interface not very active. Okay so this frustrates me a bit because VIVIS is a virtual information system and data drives policy so we have not these discussions today but had we had a tracking system on VIVIS the contributors to VIVIS would be education, health, and human services. You share a system and millions were acquired to establish VIVIS for this very same purpose. So to have a discussion on workforce development, issues surrounding our people, how we can improve them without the data, the comprehensive data, not data just from DHS, this government continues to work in a silo over and over and over again and we expect different results. That's the definition of insanity. So we passed the VIVIS legislation in the 33rd legislature and it was vetoed like everything else, like WAPA. We vetoed WAPA five times. So what in a cabinet meeting is anyone discussing the importance of the VIVIS system? UVI cell Dr. Noreen Michael came to discuss the importance of VIVIS and what it could do. Almost every few years, UVI continues to collect data in between the census. Had we had a repository for that data, our discussions would be very, very different today. So what are your discussions in a cabinet meeting? Do we allow a million dollar, a three point something million dollar project to just die um because data is so critical

3:00:02 we i'm really glad that you're bringing it up uh senator saru because this is a conversation we have internally uh speaking um and i do agree with you when it comes to data it does drive policy it also drives what you need in order to accommodate the needs of our our community so i appreciate that. As far as specifically cabinet meetings I think most of the work is usually done in between a cabinet meeting. And so I think that you know in light of today's discussion I'll make sure that I bring it up again and just kind of bring it back around to ensure that we have a system even within human services we serve a lot of people in in the public. I'm not going to take much of your time but we do that and we need an integrated system and so we are actually working towards having that specifically moving forward. that's what we're actually working on right now with internally because nothing is more frustrating to sit in a budget mock-up and to craft policy with no data you just say oh let's get him an extra million dollars and get him get him 500k extra because we want this program to work and we really at a point where we're in the year 2021 data should be driving policy for the federal government to give dhs money and federal grants is on data it's on the census for the stimulus checks to come out it's based on the number of people and who file their taxes this is what happens but in the virgin islands we just so we like you know the cartoons the jetsons and the flintstones we win a flintstone era when do we move now going to the ctech board there's still a issue with lack of teachers. I heard your vague response earlier to the Senator to the right of me.

3:01:47 What are some possible solutions to improving the amount of teachers in the CTEC program? Well, Senator, the big issue we have with getting teachers for the CTEC program, and I'll be frank, is salary. When you have an individual... I need a problem. I had a salary. Tell me the proposed solutions on the discussions you're having to address the salary issue. Well,

I've had meetings with, I've had a meeting with the teachers union, which allowed me to speak, but you could tell. I didn't want to entertain the idea that CTE instructors be paid different than teachers, than academic teachers.

3:02:40 So does a CTE teacher have to be unionized? As far as I know, in the Virgin Islands, the teacher in the school, the teacher would have to be unionized. I probably still need to do my research on that. But I've done research on salaries. Hold on a second, doctor. Sure. Hold on a second, Doc. The question would be, that's the research. Nothing is wrong with breaking the norm. In the absence of, this is, we're talking about trades. Across the nation, you have magnet programs, you have Vogue schools. So, have we looked at the model across the U.S. to see if CTECH teachers are in a different union, if they're unionized, non-unionized, is a hybrid program? Have we done any of that research to try to fill this gap? I've done research on teachers' salary throughout the United States as far as CTE. I don't even like to call them teachers.

3:03:37 I like to call them instructors. I'm not talking about salary. I'm talking about how you incorporate them into CTECH programs. I know the salary is an issue, but if we're able to get them on contract, if we're able to remove them from the union but hire them on a different model, have you looked at the models across the United States? No, I haven't. But we can hire CTE teachers on contract. But again, the board has no control over that. That's all done and determined by the Department of Education. And until the board has some sort of say or control over those things, we're just a shadow. We're just there to say we have a CTE board. we have no control over hiring we have no control over salary we're fighting just to have control over programs that ct programs in our school okay i just have one more question it's only like a little bit of us here so madam chair may conclude i'm not done with this teacher situation in the second round i'll follow up can i follow up madam chair you can proceed okay commissioner We have a high level of recidivism from those who leave our prison system.

3:04:57 Do you have any conversations with the Board of Corrections, not Board, Bureau of Corrections on a prison-to-work transition program, U, Labor, BOC, and I'm asking, well, you seem to be the only one that decided to show up today, so I guess I'll have to direct my portion of the question to you um because it's a problem and technically education boc labor and dhs you share the very same population so is there any conversation on a on a prison and breaking a prison to pipeline program i haven't been recently i haven't been involved in any of that i'm not sure if any of my colleagues have um specifically we've done our youth program and try to you know decrease the recidivism rate within our youth programs as far as YRC is concerned but as far as it specifically graduating and going to bureau of corrections and then trying to break that mold I have not been personally involved in that quite yet anyone on the line and then we also have an apprenticeship we passed the apprenticeship bill in in the 32nd at 8063 and the apprenticeship program is fully funded and it has yet to kick off, which would be the Department of Labor. But like I said, this whole silo thing, lack of data, no conversation. Is anyone on the screen today having that collective discussion on how, cause our crime rate is a problem and we continue to treat the symptom and not the disease.

3:06:37 And the disease is really that detached, You know, whether it's a lack of education, a lack of a skill, you know, something is wrong. How are we trying to address crime through programs like the apprenticeship program or breaking that, you know, that continuance of returning to crime when you come out of jail, you have no skill. There's no prison to workforce program to get them in jobs. So they end up, a few prisoners have come, well, not say prisoners, but ex-cons have come to the office begging for work. And I am confused as where to send them. And they're looking for work and they don't want to go back on the streets, but we don't have a system that cultivates that. So what among you guys on the screen from CTECH to UVicel to DHS, what are your conversations?

3:07:28 Senator Sarra, if I may, this is Ms. Green from Vofria. Can you hear me? Yes, I can, go ahead. Okay, in reference to conversations, I know we've been in conversations with the Department of Labor in regards to their second chance programs. So they have been looking at the different populations in which they need to work on getting training and employment to those individuals. We've had discussions several times. I'm not sure where they are with that program, but we have discussed that. They recently, I know, worked on their Work Opportunity Tax Credit Program, which would also provide employers with a credit if they were to hire individuals that came from the prison system or came from the juvenile justice system, voc rehab program, any one of the target areas they're trying to work towards, trying to shore up the services to those populations. and to conclude i don't want to abuse the time because the conversation is critical but we are at a critical juncture in this territory with crime and we have to get beyond the point of the conversations at some point you have to just do it and every time somebody comes we're having a conversation we haven't we're going to talk ourselves to death so it's my hope that we really really leave today's meeting and go back with a renewed sense of purpose and how we can address as the fundamental issues of our time. Thank you, Madam Chair.

3:09:03 Thank you very much, Senator Saru. Very, really, really resonates with questions. And I just wanna continue to put on record and to help the public understand what we're facing, right? The Virgin Islands Board of Career and Technical Education, and that's Title 17, Section 262, the Virgin Islands Board for Career and Technical Education shall be the sole

agency in the administration the career and technical programs in the Virgin Islands and what we have by way of practice is a misalignment with the law and if we follow the and if we also analyze for those who are aware of the history of workforce development many of our elders speak about the CETA program the CETA program is the workforce development program the workforce development board in CETA days of the board then the same board now under different names so you can name it differently and and but also our history is very informative in terms of the breakdown I think that dr. McGrath I saw your hand was up you had a you wanted to make a comment yes thank you so much this is Suzanne Dara McGrath I'm the director for UVI cell I had a technology challenge there a moment ago I apologize but I did want to weigh in on what Senator Saru was asking in regards to the Bureau of Corrections and the prison to work program since I have I've started here in September of 2019.

3:10:26 I have been extremely passionate and working very hard to build that relationship between the Bureau of Corrections, Educational Connections, the Department of Labor, make sure we're engaging our folks at the YRC to ensure they are also connected. UVICEL, we were contracted to do the Bureau of Corrections Strategic Plan, which really helped us to understand all the challenges that the Bureau is facing, especially in the re-entry space. So as we know, there is no re-entry, no formal re-entry program here in the Virgin Islands. We are very far behind and we see the violence that happens here on a regular basis. And from my perspective and from my team's perspective, this is our mission to reduce recidivism and to stop the bleeding that is happening. So we do meet weekly with the Bureau of Corrections every single Friday for an hour with the Director, Director Testamark and Peter Abrahams and other folks who are involved in re-entry.

3:11:22 And then on the third Friday of each month, we have our re-entry task force. That is a grassroots effort that we've started through UVICEL to bring together all of our collaborative partners to ensure that our returning citizens have a path to employment. So what we have accomplished, it's been very, very effective to date. We have helped the Bureau of Corrections to establish vocational and academic programs within the facility, including our NCCR program. We certified eight individuals, including one inmate who is now a welding instructor and will be providing courses within the facility. We're also supporting other NCCR courses there.

3:12:06 On the academic side, we're supporting the online high school program. We know that the majority of our inmates do not have a high school diploma. So we're engaging in that space as well. We were able to connect the Bureau of Corrections and Department of Labor around that transition. And we've connected now our case managers who are at the Bureau of Corrections with our case managers at the Department of Labor. And we know there are 35 employers here in the territory that are able to receive support and funding through providing those pathways to employment for people that have barriers, like our folks who have been incarcerated. This is something we're very, very passionate about. And I don't know if Dr. Khorram, if you want to also weigh in on the work we are doing with the Bureau of Corrections. Before you proceed, Dr. Khorram, good morning to you. Senator Suru, you had a point of inquiry. You wanna let Dr. Khorram speak or you wanna proceed with your point of inquiry?

3:13:05 Dr. Khorram could respond and then I'll do my point of inquiry. Okay, thank you. You're on mute Dr. Coram, you're on mute I'm so sorry okay you can you can start my apology good afternoon thank you and good morning to everyone I just wanted to also add that the university has engaged the BOC in developing educational, access to education here at the university. So there are some inmates that are currently enrolled online at the University of the Northern Islands in hopes that later on, once they transition through their re-entry program, they'll be skilled to enter the workforce from that perspective as well.

3:14:06 Thank you. Thank you, Senator Saru. Your point of inquiry. Thank you. So the last question would be, and I guess I'll go to CTEC and to everybody else. The Bureau of Economic Research conducts, of course, they're the main statistical agency within this government. Have we looked at the information from the Bureau of Economic Research to indicate it shows you the flourishing industries in the territory, whether it's industrial, tourism, you know, whatever. Have we looked at those industries and the areas that lack the capacity for it to be done? Like look at the road work.

3:14:49 We have people doing road work, but our local people are waving a flag. That's what we do, right? How do we get on the machines? How do we get to the heart of those industries? So are you looking at that data from BER to shift the focus within CTEC to say, okay, hey, the hurricanes have showed us that we do not have enough work at people and skilled people. So our target for the next five years strategic plan includes producing 20% more masons and plumbers and electricians. You know, how are you interfacing or utilizing the Bureau of Economic Research data to determine the direction you want to go in okay that's one of the tasks that my executive director the executive director for the board has where he goes on and downloads that data from the Department of Labor actually website and so he would be able to answer that better than I would mr. deuce Mr. Deuce, are you there?

- 3:16:11 My concern, Dr. Francois, is you sent me a lifeline to talk to somebody else, but as chair at CTECH board that should be in the discussions listen we need to get this and this happening and you should be able to at least tell me that the plan is to produce this amount or this percentage of of masons and plumbers and painters those who paint the walls outside or indoors or whatever like what what you transform it to somebody else but as a head of CTECH what is that discussion that based on this data and the territory has a um an unemployment gap how are we moving to fill the gap from the avenue of ctech of course labor has a role dhs has a role but you have a role they begin with you and then when they come from you they move someplace else so i need i need some i need an answer somewhere somehow again senator the problem we have as a c-tech board is that the c-tech power that power that we supposed to develop programs and we supposed to decide what programs are in our schools and territory the board hasn't had that we're we're in a struggle right now to gain that type of authority and it takes more of our time struggling to gain that authority than moving forward with anything else that we have Because for many years, the Department of Education and other departments have decided what programs or CTE programs we're going to have in the territory.
- 3:18:01 Even now, programs are being developed unbeknownst to us. We find out through the grapevine, and then we have to go and research and find out why these programs are being worked on and nobody told us. So until we get that authority back where we make decisions on CT programs in the territory, to answer your question will be extremely difficult. Thank you.
- 3:18:27 Thank you, Madam Chair, I digress. Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you. Well, I think we're getting into the weeds of things and we're getting into some areas that present challenges for us to move forward. that end, an effort that is being made, is to address the issues surrounding the authority. The Virgin Islands Department of Education, again, has a state career anti-education office. That office has, for some time now, gone ahead and taken over the authority of the Career Ontario Education Board taking over the funding source the Carl D Perkins grant that we have from February 12th hearing we requested that Commissioner Barry Benjamin provide us with the update regarding the expenditure of that fund the board is over supposed to oversee the fund but to date the board with basic meetings about basic expenditures, wherein the State Career and Technical Education Office has decided what programs have set the salaries. Now the law states that the CTECH board is responsible for the vetting and hiring of teachers as well as of course contractors and then sent to the governor as a practices right now through the collective bargaining process the c-tech teachers have been are under the union so the process by which is going to require collaboration is going to require exercise of authority is going to require oversight and support to fix this situation because as it is right now the lack of power lack of you know infrastructure is really breaking down the system and we should we should also find it really alarming that the board of the center of this turns the Department of Labor the center of recidivism because actually CETA was once a once upon a time we were addressing the issue of reentry and we were working hard and we had programs in place but have all been destroyed through various efforts over time so
- 3:20:42 So we're now on the cusp, the push is to reform the system, set the boards properly, align them, the departments to start engaging and collaborating and moving from discussions to putting items on paper and executing. I will proceed, Senator Joseph has a point of information and then I will proceed with my time by seven minutes to ask my questions thank you so much madam chair i just wanted to point out from the last meeting we had for this committee and i'm sorry he is not here the chairman of the vi workforce development board indicated and stated some very uh clearly on the record the demand driven industry and he had construction being absent from those demand driven industry. I believe that construction is part of the state plan for the development for the Workforce Development Board and so it is clear that there is some misalignment. If I would like to recommend, Madam Chair, the next time you invite the VI Workforce Development Board, also extend an invitation to the Executive Director of the VI Workforce Development Board, which is Ms. Sonia Boyce.
- 3:22:21 Thank you for that, Colleague, and just to emphasize, I've had a critical meeting one-on-one Because the role of the chairperson, have the one-on-ones, get my committee members involved through the caucus process as well, and then outwards. And then a lot of the work has already we go back to the files of the history of this committee, and we work forward. Now, in terms of the outreach to the director and to the board chairman, that's why I had the first interim meeting with them to get this information. And so that is why he was invited. But again, we should recognize that they've been awarded \$10 million, and that is not to the exception of the other millions of dollars they receive from the U.S. Department of Labor. And so today was to find out from the main vendor, the vendor that's getting all of this workforce money, what are they doing with the money? that's the goal because when I when we follow the money and when when research is done to analyze what happens to communities of color we see that we've been taken advantage over and over again I come from the background of the whole issue of human rights so when I get into housing and crisis and all that we look at it from a racial dimension and and that's you know those are apparent in different spaces and I see it also in this for in this regard we have to deal with things as they are there's an awarded contract and we were asked for them to

present the workforce development board board members if you are on this board some of you on the call are on the board petition mr. cardi to have meetings we had a meeting we had a hearing the other day regarding morons that representative from the marine industry indicated that she also confirmed that the board had not met yet and still monies are awarded for morons you know so you go on and on money's being doled out and doled out and given where there's been no meetings so there is that investigatory action that needs to be taken I've initiated that I'm gonna work with my colleagues on this and we're

3 : 24 : 28 gonna uproot these these awful like we have the roots of oppression these we have a lot of roots of oppression here in the Virgin Islands some is acted against ourselves so that's the purpose of the meeting let me go ahead and ask my questions I want to you know focus in on if you want to start my start the clock for me please okay so come Commissioner Kazi Gomez I want to focus in on one of a few a few of the items surrounding your testimony particularly as it pertains to the we have rehabilitation of clients so what are the eligibility requirements for employers so through the work opportunity tax credit programs what are the um requirements for employers what are the general requirements thank you for the question senator whitaker um either ac rymer brown or um the screen please yes uh good afternoon mikhael rymer brown assistant commissioner so the work opportunity tax credit although it is open for employers it must be employers who usually file on the mainland so you're going to have some restrictions you have i know office depot you have certain hotels you have um walgreens and miss green may know of others but there is that restriction that there is has to be that connection to the mainland um filing and um connection with the larger corporations so for the territory that that is a limitation there but there's several that we can get the work opportunity tax credits um with the department of labor i don't have an exhaustive list but i mentioned just a few of those that are readily available and that we refer our clients to and in terms of addressing as we can see there's some duplication of efforts to some extent right what MOUs or what agencies are you in partnership with in terms of specifically for vocational rehab what agencies are you have any

3 : 26 : 39 MOUs with or just partnerships I think we've mentioned a few in the testimony you know department of labor department of education disability rights I know I'm missing about 12 other ones uh sorry who else do we have um as it pertains to the workforce innovation opportunity act you basically mentioned the core partnerships um it's department of labor and department of education okay so what i would suggest you have a partner right here we were gathered here today i would suggest you add the ctech board as a partner the board education um as a partner so we can work holistically together and we can continue develop partnerships and of course UVICL. I cannot forget you, Dr. McGrath. Okay. The question I have to you, Commissioner Cozzi-Gomez, Commissioner Gomez, did you make any interface or meet with the version of Housing and Finance Authority Board specifically as it pertained to workforce development funding or any funding for vocational rehab? Did you have any exchanges with the board, Mr. Griffith, on securing any necessary funding to address any matches or federal matches that you could have been used through federal funds or just overall workforce development and vocational rehabilitation housing finance authorities specifically regarding workforce development correct because they were working on a lot of other things but not specifically for me ac ram around you're shaking your head that's we're not no workforce development not at this point but certainly that is an area that we'll be pursuing um we are working more on the rehabilitation of our facilities with housing finance but definitely uh sharia green cindy rollins and um miss bailey who oversees our tanf and snap employment we will be um pursuing that as soon as possible that's That's excellent. Thank you. Dr. Francois, can you speak and give us just a general

3 : 28 : 43 overview of the collaborative efforts, naming key departments that the CTEC board has engaged with concerning workforce development, and as well as highlight, you indicated that the ROTC program is gonna be, well it's now a program for CTEC. Can you give more details on that as well? and that on that effort to make that effort for that program to be your newest program. Okay, thank you, Senator. Colonel Charles, who's over the ROTC program in the Virgin Islands approached us recently. I brought it to our attention that in the United States, in most states ROTC is under the CT programs. programs. And he would like to do the same here in the Virgin Islands. So we took a look at the program, we see what was required, and we went ahead and petitioned, for lack of a better word, to get ROTC under CTE with the approval of the Commission of Education.

3 : 29 : 54 So that was done. And what we're doing presently, we're in the process of getting the ROTC instructors certified as CTE instructors even though they're already certified as ROTC instructors we want to make sure that they meet the Virgin Islands requirements to be CTE instructors so we're working on that as we presently speak as far as well I just want to stop you there that so and in terms of that effort you still have to go through the department education to get that program approved then it goes to the governor then comes back so again we're talking about that added layer of processing yes okay and then the other other programs collaboration in that regard at fast collaboration we try to have meetings with several different entities um try to do it on a monthly basis if possible if the other entities are available so we have a monthly meeting with the board of education we haven't had a meeting since the board got its new members but that's on our schedule to have a collaboration meeting at least once a month with the board of education we also do

the same with the department of education where where we meet with the commissioner and her team monthly.

3:31:24 We're also trying to set up meetings with the workforce development board, but we have a member on our board that's also a member on that board. So a lot of the information is passed through her, which is Dr. McGrath. And we also, we've had meetings with the department of labor, but we would like to continue having those type of meetings, if not on a monthly base with Department of Labor, at least a quarterly base with the Department of Labor.

3:31:53 Time. Thank you, and so, and I believe, so what does, and there's any other program that the board is currently working on? Yeah, yes, right now the curriculum committee for the board is looking at an agriculture program. They're working hard on an agriculture program together for our high schools. Okay, and just to reference agriculture, a requirement for our children to learn agriculture from kindergarten to 12th grade and just by way of background and research the um the board is now unearthing a 19-year gap in the review and updates to that curriculum and certainly the work that's going to be involved therein so thank you for that. I know my time has been called I just want to ask of Dr. McGrath. Dr. McGrath. Can you you outline in terms of as we continue to support workforce development under your purview what kinds of financial aid or even scholarship programs are being offered in some of these key areas you mentioned of course that UVI cell is on the cusp of developing various programs so we're speaking about construction earlier in terms of that importance of that industry are there any scholarships and then also with support for teachers have to come back in and go through the certification process through the CTEC Board of Board of Education.

3:33:18 Yes, thank you, Senator. This is Suzanne Darin-McGrath from UVICEL. We are approved providers through the Department of Labor, and we are able to tap into WIOA funding. So right now we have three courses that individuals can go to the Department of Labor and apply and receive funding, and those three courses are administrative assistant, child daycare management, and clinical medical assistant. So all three of those courses are currently available through the Department of Labor, through WIOA and UVicel. Those courses are online and they do include the certification exam as well as a one-year access to our computer lab to take classes if you don't have access at home or internet access at home.

3:34:04 So we don't have, we're not able to tap into UVI's tuition or free tuition at this point in time, but we do offer free courses for our veterans. When it comes to our teachers, we do offer many courses that are in support of teacher certification as Dr. Francois mentioned, we have a critical gap with our teacher certification. And so we do provide online Praxis Prep. That's one of the requirements for our teachers to take Praxis. We have the VI History and Culture course, as well as we're exploring online courses that can be substituted for certification, which I'll be presenting to our UBI School of Education soon. I've been working with Ms. Nancy Colwood from the State Office of Career and Technical Education, and she is working hard to, they have funding available for NCC, our teacher certification. So we're looking to certify four teachers in the next couple of weeks here, as well as provide up to 15 teachers with their tuition to the VI History and Culture course. And we'll have a separate class that'll be established for those teachers, for CTE teachers specifically. Thank you very much, Dr. McGrath.

3:35:19 And I will close up with, back to human service. So to Ms. Green, the question I have for you for you really centers on the current programs the Department of Labor, particularly the One Stop, have any of, do you have like the, well, I know we asked questions about numbers earlier and that's really critical. I also believe in data. How many students, well, rather clients I should say rather have gone through even the One Stop program.

3:35:51 The Department of Labor has a One Stop program. One of, a vendor was awarded \$5 million. that closed out last fiscal year. How many of our people were able to really take advantage for a entity that was awarded \$5 million to assist persons with employment, or re-employment, I should say? Prior to COVID, Senator, the counselors were in the one-stop at least one day a week. Since COVID, we have yet to return. But many times the counselors would have the participants come to the Department of Labor so they can work with them there, go through the job search and do what they have to do on the view system. So a lot of our participants do frequent the One Stop. So we do want to continue that partnership.

3:36:44 And I think under WIOA, this is where these discussions should take place because we already have the partnerships in place and we just want to make sure that all the stakeholders are also invited to the table so we can have a cohesive delivery of services to the population. Thank you and I know we definitely have is a significant gap, you know, the school workers and so a lot more resources have to be placed within our education system from the elementary, middle school and high school level. So otherwise we're gonna continue this cycle that we're in, a cycle where a large percentage of money has been towards the adults and very little towards the children's actual skills necessary to get grade by grade and certainly be part of the workforce system. So we'll now proceed with our final round of three minutes. Okay, Senator Potter, you may proceed for your three minutes.

3:37:42 Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Well, question is to Dr. Francois and it's regarding the vacant critical technical positions at CTEC. How long have these positions been vacant? How long have these technical positions been vacant?

Mr. Deuce, you want to answer that question? Good afternoon. How long have these positions been Well, that question would be the best answer to individual principals of the schools. I can give you a listing of openings that we have. How long have they been open? It's a question I cannot answer you directly. Okay. Okay. Well, my reason for asking the question was really that I believe that the positions have been vacant for quite a long time, in some cases for years. My question was if it would be in our best interest or the interest of the board to pursue, my mother used to say there's more than one way to skin a cat. I was thinking about maybe some of the standout persons in the program, standout high schoolers or seniors, being given the opportunity to have a scholarship, maybe to go to a technical school for a couple of years. They do that for two years, they come back, they enroll in the free tuition program at UVI just to get the core educational courses, and then they agree to come back to work for

3:39:34 the Virgin Islands government. I'm wondering if some creative approach like that, whether or not you would be amenable, Dr. Francois, to an approach like that. Identifying those standout students in the program right now, offering them a scholarship opportunity to a technical college on the mainland, and getting them to, in exchange for that, agreeing to come back to the territory to teach some of these courses that have, you know, been vacant for many, many years. What are your thoughts on that? I think that's an excellent idea. Even with the scholarships we give now, one of the things we try to do is get the recipients of those scholarships to come back and work in the Virgin Islands or do some kind of CT work in the Virgin Islands. I think that's an excellent idea. also one of the things i want to add with with that recommendation is that in a lot of our city courses we have one instructor and when that instructor leaves or pass pass away or whatever that program comes to a heart i think that we need to also look at hiring at least two instructors for each program that way when one instructor leaves we have an additional instructor to carry on those programs but i think that's an excellent idea and that's something maybe um the board needs to do a proposal for or not maybe we should we will look at that to do a proposal and um see how we could get funding to do such a thing the next time i speak with you i'll ask you the status of that

3:41:25 Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Very good. My final question, Madam Chair, is to Commissioner Kazi-Gomez and her team. And it's regarding a TANF program on, I think, line 278 of your testimony, Commissioner Gomez. You mentioned the University of the Virgin Islands Caribbean Exploratory Research Center on Health Disparities completed a research project focused on the Virgin Islands TANF employment and training program. This research will serve as a catalyst for improving our DHS TANF employment and training program as we move forward.

3:42:03 My question is, I just wanted to hear a little more about the results of that project and how the new TANF program, how you project the new TANF program to look. I believe from what I am understanding, TANF is structured in a way that single parents or a single head of household families are the only entities that qualify. And if you have a dual parent household where both parents are unemployable, they would not be qualified just based on the fact that you have two parents in the household.

3:42:45 I don't know if that's a fact or not, but I was hoping if it was that maybe this new redesign program would make some changes to the way that program looks currently. Thank you very much. I'm going to allow AC Robert Brown to answer, but I just wanted to kind of just check in about the, when we began the process, we wanted to make sure that our efficiencies were done and emerging into one, I feel, is the best interest of everybody involved and so I think that that will be a good use of our our team our resources as y'all know that it's been difficult to hire in the past and so in futuristic but as far as the research concerned go ahead AC. Yes as our commissioner was just talking about doing a bit of a merger of the SNAP and the TANF employment and training programs one of the things that we definitely will be doing is renaming the program name has a lot to do with with something and and programs and really for this the TANF employment and training a job is not the only end-all and be-all many times the low-income TANF person may take a job and they may be a cashier or a low income or minimum wage. I believe in the redesign we are looking to expand the career pathways and that type of employment and training focus and focus on the high demand industries. Yes you are right. Currently we only have the single parent household. That is a restriction.

3:44:27 We will look at that. But Senator we do also have some caps federal caps of monies in the area for TANF so funding is will play a role one of the key ideas under the research was really more employer outreach and employer gauging their openness to accept TANF clients into their businesses that is an area we're going to be doing a lot more employer education and also building up the skills and the levels of the TANF clients themselves so they can see a pathway forward so it's going to be a dynamic process we're about to engage a new director of employment and training for both SNAP and TANF so we're excited about the possibilities for the rest of 21 when we have a redefined and a re-energized TANF and SNAP employment and training program thank you very much thank you and to highlight that also to the human service you also are working on the 21st century principles that's you know really looking at improving the operations as well so I know that you indicated that and so with that I will continue to say really and truly it won't be

effective unless it's collaborative, unless the department specifically meets with all the entities. The Department of Education is a huge entity and we can see now over the years it's this whole breakdown of CTEC is not working. The State Education Office has not been able to really uphold, it's really, really and truly it's not working and we know that we see it so before our students you know poor individual matriculate and finish school that they have as many skills we can get you know them involved with as possible and trained in and move forward on senator saru you're up for your three minutes there's a room That's the room.

3:46:40 Thank you, Madam Chair. Have you looked at the data from VIPD? They have a planning and research division. Have you looked at the data and the amount of criminals repeat offenders? That directed to me, Senator. Yes, Senator. Everyone, we're having a workforce development discussion, so...

3:47:10 Have we... Do we look at the... Go ahead. Go ahead, Dr. Amin, Commissioner Gomez. Thanks for the elevation. Thanks for the elevation. I have actually looked at the statistics, but it hasn't been recent, within the last probably four or five months. I do think that just taking a quick look at what that looks like looks like and seeing past clients or their clients of our system and how they're they're going they're feeding into VIPD and what they're seeing right now would be probably beneficial to us we just haven't gotten to that part right now okay Dr. Francois no I know I haven't I don't know if anyone else on my bottom my executive director has but i haven't um i've been more focused on saving our students in high school and junior high than looking outside of that at this time the data for the um planning and research division has data from the juveniles as well those who go to yrc those who are in the juvenile programs and what how many times they've been arrested picked up on what's not so mr So Francois, your answer does not suffice at all. Dr. McGrath?

3:48:34 Yes, good afternoon. I'm looking for the latest data, but we do receive that regular information from the Bureau of Corrections. They are actively tracking that now with the different software tools that they have put in place. So we should be able to get that information to you pretty quickly. I just have to make a couple of phone calls. But that is something that is being actively tracked on the strategic plan. It's one of the critical metrics. And I know the BOC, they've recently hired someone to manage the strategic planning and support strategic planning efforts. And it would be definitely data-driven, which I know is critical for all of our efforts here in the territory.

3:49:19 That's something that we've historically struggled with. Okay, and I think I'll just conclude there. I just asked about vivis in the first round. I asked about how are we using a view of economic research. We're not using that data. The VIPD is producing their data. We're not using their data. Because if we're able to see, Madam Chair? That's fine. Is your indulgence? Go ahead, go ahead.

3:49:47 If we're able to, okay, if we're able to see the outcomes and what the outcomes are, then we're able to, on the front end, push programs that would prevent what we're seeing at the VIPD. The VIPD is the last step in workforce development in saving our people, period. So I'm just a bit exhausted today. And I think my tone expresses my exhaustion of the fact that we are just having conversations and we're in planning, we're in preparation, we're doing this, we're gonna meet next week and the streets are running red. And of course, parents and schools have a duty, but government has a duty to fill the gap as well. We all have a role, and on this end, we have not fulfilled our duties insofar as developing a skilled labor workforce.

3:50:48 I mean, when people start to work, they feel valued. Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you. And I will move now on to Senator Joseph for your three minutes. Thank you so much, Madam Chair. I just want to say that I have spent significant time in my career working in the trenches with both young people who are recidivist, adjudicated, and we had to have data available to be able to apply for funding and demonstrate that level of need definitely we have a huge gap relative to the collaboration the conversations working together as I have termed it to be to breed just like we as people who have hair are accustomed to or even twist, to braid those resources so it is aligned and everyone is neatly working together with the end in mind.

3:52:09 That end outcome is definitely providing these services so that our participants, our students are economically self-sufficient. That is our end goal. That should be our end goal, the economic self-sufficiency. I know, Madam Chair, you spoke eloquently regarding the level of oppression. There is a system of oppression, and we have to see how we can work to eliminate it. I wanted to ask if, and this is to Dr. McGrath, relative to your work with the private industry as well as a public industry that you mentioned on page two of your testimony do you have articulated moas or mous with uh your partners and how does that work just be succinct yes so we do have moas with partners and we go through the property and procurement process um we get contacted to um do custom training and then we do the research on our side to establish what those courses will be if we need to develop curriculum we will if we need to identify um instructors we will do so and we'll put together an agreement a contract and share that with our partner agencies and then we'll go through the property and procurement process and get our legal folks involved. Okay, Dr. McGrath, my time is running, and I want to ask the same question to the Commissioner of Human Services, Dr. Casey Gomez. Kindly indicate, do you

- have existing MOAs or MOUs with your partners? Those will be the public-private partners. Do you have those,
- 3:54:02 and how are they working? I don't need to know the process. Actually we do have MOUs because you know usually in especially with federal money we can't get into an agreement or conversation usually without an MOU or an MOA depending upon if it's money or not money. Whether it's when you say it's working right now we're in the process of reviewing every single contract lease agreement MOU to ensure that it's working. As far as workforce development I believe that there always needs to be improvement. system that we talked about the data collection we have data for every single program that that's not the problem the problem is is that it's not an integrated data system where you're able to pull to see and cross-reference at the same time so um what happens when we're when we're preparing we have the data it just would be nice to be able to have that cross-reference of okay well this particular client crosses three programs right and so i think that that's really our it's ultimate goal for it but as far as the mou and working relationships with our partner agencies i think that we're doing a pretty good job and i think there's always room for improvement senator okay thank you i just want to wrap up really quick because my time has expired and i'm trying to be respectful even though that our our committee meeting because persons have deemed that that these items were already covered, is that the MOUs and MOAs are critical because that is how we are able to align the services required. MOUs and MOAs should be in existence with all low-income, any type of service existing for low-income families, families, and that include a single parent or a single person is in a low income bracket. That includes also the Virgin Islands Housing Authority
- 3:56:02 because they also have that economic self-sufficiency component. So we have to be able to go into where people live, a lot of them live within the Virgin Islands Housing Authority. And so those are some of the things that we need to look at braiding those resources. i know my time has expired i want to thank you all for the work that you do and i just want to let you know to just be encouraged to continue the work and continue to build on the collaborations that are existing thank you thank you and so i will conclude just with my statement and then we'll we'll move into conclusions for each testifier. And so there's one particular quote that I want to conclude with. Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.
- 3:57:01 That quote is by an individual Nelson Mandela, who inspired many. And as we close out this this hearing today and as we look forward to future hearings I really want to continue to emphasize that we are facing critical issues. It is our duty as the Education Committee to have oversight over the Department of Education, Department of Labor, Board of Education, the CTEC Board, and we are all engaged in the process. I ask that was we invite testifiers that they respect the process after the hearing we have a hearing there's been requests for information so I ask all the departments to respectfully give us the information we are seeking and we can and let us move from the conversations to work sessions and then present before hearings and where we see legislation needing to be had we vet that ask for your input and we come together in a collective collective effort I'll go ahead now and start have you first Commissioner Kazi-Gomez provide your closing statement first and foremost I always a special thank you to our frontlines essential employees of the Department of Human Services they are really the ones that are doing the work chairwoman Genevieve Whitaker and the members of the Committee on Education and Workforce Development. We really truly appreciate the opportunity to provide our testimony today. I think it's an ongoing conversation. Our employment and training programs and a consolidated effort should always be together.
- 3:58:46 Collaboration and of course like Senator Saru said earlier the data-driven system is really truly the key component of our development and the workforce especially. I think workforce development allows for our individuals to gain and improve their skill set not only for themselves personally but also in the job market in the workplace. We are lifelong learners and training is always a good return on investment. So for our for even within our internal and our organization I always always support professional development and making sure that we're getting through it. So if we can track can continue to track our measurable skill gains and show how we can prepare for the workforce for the success I'm all in.
- 3:59:27 um and so especially training in our seniors and persons with disabilities and of course our families that we serve on a regular basis we stand committed um to not only this legislature the executive branch and a special thank you to the brian roach administration we're here to serve so thank you so much for the opportunity today thank you thank you for attending today's hearing dr francois your concluding statement our last thoughts yes yes thank you i'd first like to thank you senator whitaker and the rest of the members of the committee for allowing us to testify the city board to testify here today we have a lot of work ahead of us we we're doing the best that we can for now I'd like to say but we're pushing forward and I made a lot of notes on on certain things that certain senators brought up and and we're gonna figure out how to address those things but other than that I just like to thank you for having us Thank you. And Dr. McGrath. Yes, thank you so much. I do want to just clarify one point on the recidivism data. I did misspeak on that. The online data system is not fully implemented at the Bureau of Corrections and the last rate collected was in 2019 where the recidivism rate was 21%. So just to make that clarification, I'd like to thank you, Honorable Chair Whitaker and members of the

committee for the opportunity to testify on behalf of UVicel today. I have sincerely appreciated today's conversation. I too have been taking a lot of notes and identifying opportunities for follow-up and future partnership. And I will remain hopeful as we move forward in collaboration to support the education and workforce development needs of our community. Thank you.

4:01:27 Thank you. And I wanna definitely thank you, thank all of you for your testimony here today. And I believe I do. I don't have to push for that. I'm from Commissioner Kazi-Gomez, Dr. Francois, Dr. McGrath. I do believe that from this hearing that there will be collaboration, that there will be work sessions. And I look forward to also meeting with you. We go through caucus processes and us moving forward on behalf of, in this case, of the children, the adults, and also even the seniors as it pertains to workforce development. Thank you very much and thank you to all those who tune in. Thank you to my staff, on the media, on the staff of the legislature who makes today possible.

4:02:09 I'm just thankful and thankful to the community for tuning in because even throughout this hearing when I emphasize people are making comments, right? The public is participating and that's what I'm emphasizing. Let the public be part of this process. Let them give feedback and critical feedback can only make you stronger, especially when it's constructive. So thank you everyone, everyone have a blessed day and enjoy the rest of your day. Thank you very much and be safe. Thank you. This meeting stands in recess, is adjourned. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back.

People named in this transcript

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