



| Committee on Youth, Sports, Parks and Recreation - 2

Legislature USVI

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- 0:00:00 *music* Thank you. Thank you. Good afternoon. The committee and youth in is back out of recess. I want to thank everyone for your patience.
- 0:03:50 We definitely took more than two minutes. We're having some major technical difficulties that hinder us from being able to stream and connect to most of our audience. So we thank you. I want to thank the testifiers for hanging on. So we're going to try to move as quickly as we can. I want to ask those that are in block two, if you could please turn off your cameras, because we're still beginning with the questions in block one and also the testifiers in block one. Only those that are speaking should turn on their cameras at the moment when they are questioned. We're trying to keep the bandwidth of the internet available so that we can be able to stay on. So I appreciate everyone's cooperation in this. So we will continue. We had Senator DeGraff that finished his line of questioning. This is a committee in youth sports park and recreation. We're in block one. So we will now hear from Senator Carla Joseph. You're up for your seven minutes. And once again, I want to ask everyone to have their cameras off until they're answering a question.
- 0:05:17 Thank you very much. Senator Joseph, you may proceed with your seven minutes. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. And a pleasant good afternoon to my colleagues as well as to the viewing and listening audience. I'm very happy that we were able to overcome that challenge. My questions are going to be aimed at the testifiers in block one. I will begin, of course, with Honorable Raquel Berry Benjamin, our Commissioner of Education.
- 0:05:53 I have some questions relative to your testimony, and I just needed to get a little bit more specification. And specifically on page three, you talked about hiring some additional personnel. Kindly indicate where are those persons hiring in your process. Have you interviewed individuals ready for those positions? Or are you still in the recruitment component of your process? Commissioner Berry Benjamin, you heard the question.

- 0:06:42 Good afternoon, Senator Joseph. We on the Zoom, we did not hear anything that Senator Carrion said as well as yourself. We've been trying to notify you and him that your mics were muted. So we haven't heard anything at all since we came back from recess. Can you hear me now? I can. Please hold the senator's time. We would start that again. I was thanking the testifiers for hanging on with us. We're experimenting some major technical difficulties, but we're back on. We're requesting that those that are connected through teams to please turn their cameras off. Those that are in block two to please turn their cameras off. We're still in block one. And in the moment that you're answering a question, please then turn your cameras on to be able to save some bandwidth space because we're having some internet issues this afternoon. So thank you. I appreciate your collaboration with that. We will continue on block one. We already heard from Senator DeGraff. Now we will hear from Senator Carla Joseph.
- 0:07:57 We have seven minutes. You may proceed, Senator Joseph. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. And I greeted the testifiers initially in my time. So I will greet you again, all the testifiers in block one and, of course, our listening and viewing audience. Commissioner Barry Benjamin, my questions. I will get to page three of your testimony. I was inquiring where in the hiring process are you with the district athletic directors? Okay.
- 0:08:37 Thank you for your question, Senator. Those directors are going to be hired through our federal funding and I will have to have our superintendents respond to that because it's not it's not at my level. It's at the district level. Let me see if we were able to get them back on. Not only are you experiencing internet issues on your end, but we are to hear the vide and our testifiers are having to lock on and off on and off as well. I'm not seeing them on at this time, Senator. I will try to get them back on. They'll get on.
- 0:09:16 Okay. Let me continue with the questioning so my time don't get away from me and I lose a lot of my time. I will move on to page five of your testimony. And I wanted to ask you to delineate on some of these programs that you have, specifically the one that you offer, the certifications for the coaches. Is this a question you could answer or you would have to wait on your supporting staff? I wanted to know the number of coaches thus far that have been certified by these programs. Would you be able to answer that question? Thank you.
- 0:10:02 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Yes. Ms. Bernalyn Tomar is online and she works directly with the DSA office. Ms. Tomar. Good afternoon, Senator Joseph. I'm a program assistant for St. Thomas St. John. At this present time, most of our coaches, I could say we have about 30, 35 coaches or more that's been certified for 2018, 2019 school year. However, for the upcoming season, we're going to get a new submittal of coaches, whoever the principals pick, and then they will be going through this program.
- 0:10:43 They'll be vetted and whoever had their certification will have to recertify every year. Okay. So you have sufficient coaches to begin the sporting programs for this school year, correct? For clarity, Senator, the principals, that is something that's done on the school-based level. Ms. Tomar cannot answer that question because when the sporting activities begin, that's when we'll get a final count as to who's coaching the different sports. That is something that principals decide and share with us. Okay.
- 0:11:24 And so you don't have that information yet because we just began the sporting year in truth because of the pandemic and the like, correct? Correct. Okay. Understood. Okay. Now, I'm on page six. I'm going along with your testimony. So I wanted to know who are your stakeholders for this student-athlete roadmap to college? You mentioned you have stakeholders and it's a guide that is still being in the process of being developed. And I want to really commend you for putting a date for your timeline to meet the deadline to release this, which is February 14th.
- 0:12:09 It's a beautiful day. That's Valentine's Day. So I hope we have a lot of heart and put a lot of heart in it. So tell me who were the stakeholders? Yes. Thank you, Senator. So in a nutshell, there are a variety of stakeholders from our parents, our students, our counselors, principals, every group of individuals, our assistant commissioner at the time, who work with students to make sure that they have a roadmap, clear steps toward the college education, those student athletes who would like to play sports in college. So everyone from the school-based level to the leadership level here at the Department of Education, Senator.
- 0:12:58 Okay. So did you involve the individuals from the Interscholastic Athletic Association? Are they part of your stakeholders? Yeah, I cannot answer that question. I know we have some entities, specific entities here. Mr. Callender, I'm not sure. Ms. Thomas, are you sure? Do you have that list? I know Mr. Callender does. And like I stated earlier, please excuse him. He's experiencing a medical emergency. Him and ACSOM at this time. We did hear you and we understand those medical emergencies.
- 0:13:29 We all have them as humans, as we age, especially they come on really rapidly. So we do understand and appreciate that. Thank you, Senator. So I don't have the list in front of me, but I don't see why they would not be a part of that vetting. It is going through the vetting process. I'm not sure if he reached to IAAS yet. Okay. And other stakeholders. Okay. And I

still have the initial question I asked, but I'll hold that if the chairman would allow. And I do have a question. And this was not in your -- and this question is for Commissioner Ustak Encarnacion.

0:14:08 I know you're working in partnership. You indicated that with the Department of Education. What does that partnership look like as far as supplies are concerned? How does that partnership look as far as supplies is concerned for testing and assuring that masking is available? 30 seconds. So Commissioner Raquel Berry, Benjamin, could speak to the fact that the masks are now a part of their uniforms, and that is mandatory. We do not supply the masks to the students or the schools. I know that funding has been provided from the federal guidelines to provide those kind of things to students if indeed they need to. But being part of the uniform, I'm sure that's a parental responsibility as well. Time. In terms of testing, we have not only supplied all testing to the Department of Education. We have educated the nurses that are part of the Department of Education. We've done a lot of training with the principals, with the teachers, and we've conducted the testing. We have gone into contractual arrangements or in the process of going into contractual arrangements with five private entities to ensure that the testing can be done on an ongoing basis throughout the territory. So those are the things that we've done. And we also provide guidance. We provide approval for projects that they put in place or want to put in place. We're ready to sit down and speak with them with the protocols having to do with beginning the sports and fitness program back up at the schools, no matter what age group we're looking at. Looking at not only CDC guidance, but testing. We're working with them in February. We're now going to, we had a meeting yesterday. We're going to be working with them on a vaccination incentive program meeting at the different schools where parents and students alike can come and be vaccinated. It's starting with two on St. Croix and two and two schools on St. Thomas. So those are the type of arrangements we've been working on together. Okay.

0:16:24 I wanted to just wrap up, if I may, Mr. Chairman. You may wrap up, Senator. Thank you. I wanted to just wrap up and ask you both to just continue the level of collaboration. I really am pleased to hear that you are looking and I would have hoped you have already contracted an entity to do those rapid tests in schools so that we could have a quick identification and individuals could be quarantined rapidly so that it doesn't spread, the pandemic doesn't spread within the schools. And I would hope, Mr. Chairman, I will have another question, but I don't want to abuse my time. So thank you very much, ladies, for your testimony and for being here and sitting through our long recess. Thank you so much.

0:17:15 Thank you, Senator Joseph. Our pleasure. Senator Carrion, may I add to her last comment? Yes. Yes, you may. Just to let everyone know, we are using the rapid testing. The two days and ongoing that we've been testing, we have been able to report all of the positives within a 24-hour period. So we will continue to do so from henceforth. So that's something that we've done and we'll continue to do.

0:17:44 Thank you for sharing that, Commissioner. Now, let me ask you, are nurses at the different schools allowed to do testing for the students? Yes, and they've been trained to do so. Yes. Okay. Thank you. Thank you for sharing that. I also would like to inform that the IAA president for the St. Croix district, Ms. Hubson, excused herself. She had a family emergency and hence why she's not present today at today's hearing. So we would like to excuse her. Senator Franklin Johnson, you're recognized for your seven minutes. Good afternoon, Mr. Chair.

0:18:26 Thank you very much for this time. Good afternoon to the testifiers. Good afternoon to the listening, viewing audience. Commissioner Berry, I would like to ask about the equipments. When was the last time the department update the equipment or purchased new equipment for the athletic programs? Thank you for the question, Senator. Ms. Tomar can give a response. Good afternoon, Senator Johnson, Bernal and Tomar, program assistant. The last time we bought any equipment, it was donated in 2018. So as of present since then, we haven't purchased any new equipment or anything for athletic programs? At this time, no. We haven't purchased any equipment. Do we have intention of purchasing some for the new school year? Yes, we do. All right. Thank you. And again to Commissioner Berry, the student athletic tracking system.

0:19:42 Is the agent, is the department buying this software or it's contractors going to be doing this tracking of these athletes? Commissioner Berry? Thank you for the question. Thank you for the question, Senator. Yes, the department will be managing the software. And again to you, Commissioner Berry, all of your students, will they be mandatory vaccination?

0:20:14 Because I heard, I think it was Ms. Hodge said that with their program, everybody, half is mandatory vaccination. In the schools, is it going to be mandatory? Are you asking, Senator? Are you asking, Senator, if all students in the schools will be vaccinated or student athletes in the schools will be mandatory vaccination? Student athletes.

0:20:40 Student athletes. Okay. Okay. So that is a parent. You had your question. That is a parent's choice, Senator, to vaccinate their child or children. If students want to play sports, then the parent will make that decision as to whether or not they can play based on their willingness to vaccinate or not. So once the parents makes that decision, if they're vaccinated, they can play. If they're not vaccinated, they cannot play in IAA sports.

- 0:21:10 And what about the bubble concept that we had last year? I think it was a joint effort between parks and rec and education. Do you guys have intention on doing that program again? Yes, Senator. We do not. Of course, as you know, we cannot predict how long and how far we're going to be in COVID-19. But absolutely, that is always on the table. And I know we've had discussions around not just doing the softball, baseball competition like we did when we honored Genix. Yeah.
- 0:21:48 But we do want to look at other sports as well. So that's a yes. The specifics on which sport, we cannot say because we have to respond and plan according to the various, the variant at the time. And I thank you very much, Commissioner Berry. And Commissioner Encarnacion, I saw in your testimony, you said department, the department recommends that all youth athletic receive health screening and clearance from health care provider prior to resuming athletic activities. Is the department, at least between education or Department of Health or each child parent will have to provide this screening from the health care service. So that was speaking to children that have been tested positive to the school system and into the sports arena.
- 0:22:42 And the reason why is because they're, as I explained, they're neurological as well as cardiac issues that may arise. And just to be sure that they're clear, the recommendation, the strong recommendation is that if you are tested, you have been tested positive, you're going back into playing sports, you should be seen by your physician prior to going back into sports. Okay. And again, to you, Commissioner Encarnacion, how many of the person that are right now hospitalized are under the age 17? I'm going to turn that over to Dr. Esther Ellis, who has more of those demographics. Okay.
- 0:23:22 Hi, good afternoon, Dr. Esther Ellis, tertiary epidemiologist for Department of Health. I will get you those numbers. It'll take me about five minutes to look at today's hospitalization numbers. And while you looked for those numbers, can't you also give us the numbers of how many fatalities under the age 17 in the territory? And I'll move on to some other question until you're ready. Okay. And to clarify, out of our total fatalities?
- 0:23:51 Under 17. Under 17. Okay. Thank you. We'll get that right now. Commissioner Berry, I think I'll come back to you to try to figure out, and I think it's between you and probably Commissioner of Health, but I think it will be more Commissioner Berry. What all sports right now are you guys considering high risk? I can begin to answer that question from a health perspective.
- 0:24:21 Okay, sure. And so right now, football and basketball would be the two. One minute. Basketball, of course, would be the highest risk because there's more contact in that with football as well. Commissioner Berry, any other sports? That is correct, Commissioner. That is correct, Commissioner. Ms. Thomas, do we have any other sports that are considered high risk due to the increase in contact, physical contact? Those are the two we discussed.
- 0:24:57 30 seconds. Thank you. Yes. Bruna went to my program, program assistant. No, only tackle football at this time and basketball from the health is a high risk sport. Mm-hmm. Okay. Thank you. And I think my final question would be to the Commissioner. Do you have a process in place for the students to understand the basic of athletic recruiting process before deciding if it is an avenue they want to pursue? Time. I'm not sure if I understand your question, Senators. To pursue as what? A career? Yeah.
- 0:25:38 To pursue in athletic programs. Sometimes some students come to school, no knowledge, no idea about the athletic programs or have no interest. So I'm trying to find out if you have something in place to show them that these are avenues and direction that they can go, that sometimes have that career in a professional athletic skill. Okay. So, Senator, yes, first of all, our programs themselves, prior to COVID, of course, the operation of our programs, the students playing ball, basketball, football, whatever it may be, is the first area of inspiration for some students. And, of course, they would inquire with the respective coaches, teachers, or whomever.
- 0:26:25 As it relates to a documented path, that's exactly one of the initiatives that is outlined in my testimony. The pathway to college, it's a career track that students, parents, counselors, everyone will have to educate children on what they're going to need if they're going to pursue a career in sports, especially if they would like college to pay for that. Thank you very much.
- 0:26:58 It's going to be released on February 14th, Senator, so the public will be aware of that. Thank you very much, Commissioner. And, Mr. Chair, I'll wait for the response for my question from the Department of Health in low of the numbers. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Very well. Dr. Elias. Dr. Elias, I'm back. We currently have one individual that's hospitalized under the age of 17, and we have had zero deaths of anyone under the age of 17. Thank you very much. Thank you. Dr. Elias, so during this whole pandemic, we've only had one individual under the age of 17 that has been hospitalized, or you're just mentioning currently we just have one?

0:27:44 Currently we have one. We have had many individuals throughout this pandemic that have been hospitalized. That would be a slightly longer analysis that I could provide by the end of the day if you want that total as well. Yeah, if you could provide that to us, how many you utilize under the age of 17 that, you know, during this process, that would be appreciated. Thank you very much for that. Senator Payne, you're now recognized for your seven minutes. Senator Payne, you're now recognized for your seven minutes. Senator Payne, you're now recognized for your seven minutes.

0:28:15 Senator Payne, you're now recognized for your seven minutes. Senator Payne, you're recognized for your seven minutes. [2 such phrases repeated 33 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

0:28:48 Senator Payne, you're recognized for your seven minutes. [1 such phrases repeated 34 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

0:29:22 Senator Payne, you're recognized for your seven minutes. [1 such phrases repeated 37 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

0:29:59 Senator Payne, you're recognized for your seven minutes. [1 such phrases repeated 45 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

0:30:44 Senator Payne, you're recognized for your seven minutes. [1 such phrases repeated 37 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

0:31:21 Senator Payne, you're recognized for your seven minutes. [1 such phrases repeated 31 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

0:31:52 Senator Payne, you're recognized for your seven minutes. [1 such phrases repeated 50 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

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0:33:51 Senator Payne, you're recognized for your seven minutes. [1 such phrases repeated 45 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

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0:37:24 Senator Payne, you're recognized for your seven minutes. [1 such phrases repeated 34 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

0:37:59 Senator Payne, you're recognized for your seven minutes. [1 such phrases repeated 30 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

0:38:29 Senator Payne, you're recognized for your seven minutes. [1 such phrases repeated 42 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

0:39:12 Senator Payne, you're recognized for your seven minutes. [1 such phrases repeated 39 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

0:39:51 Senator Payne, you're recognized for your seven minutes. [1 such phrases repeated 57 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

0:40:48 Senator Payne, you're recognized for your seven minutes. [1 such phrases repeated 32 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

0:41:21 Senator Payne, you're recognized for your seven minutes. [1 such phrases repeated 30 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

0:41:54 Senator Payne, you're recognized for your seven minutes. [1 such phrases repeated 33 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

- 0:42:27 Senator Payne, you're recognized for your seven minutes. [1 such phrases repeated 25 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]
- 0:42:54 Senator Payne, you're recognized for your seven minutes. [1 such phrases repeated 26 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]
- 0:43:20 Senator Payne, you're recognized for your seven minutes. [1 such phrases repeated 42 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]
- 0:44:02 Senator Payne, you're recognized for your seven minutes. Correct. And severe adverse reaction would be somebody that required hospitalization. So we have not had any severe adverse reactions. But we did say the same thing. And for those that did, what assistant did you give to the family? That's it for me, Mr. Chair. So it would be a contact with a physician or recommendation that they either go to emergency room or see what their private physician, their medications that can be given if allergic reactions occur, depending on level of allergies that you're seeing. And so those are the support that we've been given. Thank you very much.
- 0:44:38 Thank you very much. Mr. Chair. You're welcome, Senator Johnson. Thank you for that question. A follow up to that, because I think Dr. Elias said from five to 11. What about minors that are under 18 to 11? Anything to report on that? Similar for that age group as far as no severe adverse reactions that required hospitalization, some minor reactions such as pain at the injection site, fever, fatigue, headache, myalgia, which is just muscle pain, but no severe adverse reactions in that age group as well. And just to remind you, the reason why we keep track of those groups separately is because the five to 11 is a different dose. It's a third of the dose that are given to the 12 and ups.
- 0:45:28 Um, and, uh, just wanted to clarify that difference. Thank you. Thank you. Uh, Senator Francis, you're recognized for your seven minutes. Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, and good afternoon to you, my colleagues, and good afternoon to the testifiers. I thank you for your testimony, testifiers thus far. Uh, Commissioner Berry, um, I want to also publicly welcome back our students to in-person school, and to just ask you how have the adjustment been?
- 0:46:02 Hi, Senator. Thank you so much. Uh, we appreciate your sentiments and warm welcome. Um, our students have been slowly, um, yet very, very graciously entering our campuses. Did you ask about the testing or the return? Uh, just, just the return generally. But if you have information regarding the testing, um, I know that there were some concerns that I heard over the radio shows as well as to, uh, calls to our office that there's still some, um, some, some, I don't want to use the word confusion, but there seems to be some delay in some testing, um, requirement as well. If you want to address that, that'll be good. Okay. Okay. Okay, great. Thank you.
- 0:46:44 Um, so I can speak about the return. The testing, as you know, is something that the Department of Health manages. Um, they just happen to be our students. So Department of Health is here with us today and can respond to that. But our students have been, um, returning to our campuses very excitingly. And our teachers, of course, um, excited to welcome them as well. We haven't had, uh, much of any, if, if, if at all, any concerns because parents were notified if they did not have, uh, the proper testing results that were negative. Students should not return to campus until they do. And the, we have checkers at each of our gates that check to make sure that students were in fact negative and each child was given a wristband so that for the remainder of this week, they don't have to present the negative COVID, um, result each day. The wristband says that they've been checked and approved for having negative results. But other than that, we have happy smiling faces on our campuses. Um, and we look forward to, you know, having just discussions with them to make sure that they, uh, understand the school campus, they understand, um, what social distancing look like.
- 0:47:59 So, so we're off to a good start. Uh, very well. And, um, you know, obviously today we're talking about the sports and athletic programs within our, um, respective department of education schools. Uh, seems like there's a very good roadmap, um, game plan on paper. And ultimately who do you have responsible for overseeing and to continue to monitor compliance and implementation of, of your roadmap and, um, you know, some of the protocol that you have put in place. Thank you, Senator. Um, if you're talking about school sports, um, or any protocol with students, it is our school principals that manage the data there on our school campuses.
- 0:48:44 Our coaches, whoever those individuals will be approved by the principal. They are the ones responsible for implementing the safety protocols, um, once out and about. And of course our office, um, this, uh, division of sports and athletics also have a role in making sure, reminding, um, our coaches and anyone else, parents, students about the safety protocols that we must practice upon their return.
- 0:49:12 And at the start of, um, at the start and during of any competition that we might have. Yeah. Very well. And commissioner, obviously, um, our students, especially our athletic students, um, have kind of fell behind, um, because of the lack of, of activities. And those are consistent with the pandemic situation that we're in, in respect to those individuals that may be vaccinated or unvaccinated. How are we, um, you know, recognizing the need for, uh, you know, weekly

testing to be done by those quote unquote professional athletes, um, that we know that that's, um, along the, um, competitive spectrum. How are we treating those and how are we accounting for weekly testing for those individuals?

0:49:58 Thank you, Senator. And, um, the, um, the commissioner of health briefly spoke about how we plan to do that, because of course we, we rely on the department of health for the, their guidance and leadership in this process. We, we have, um, plans to do that. And they will advise as to the who, what, when, where, and how for us to get that done. I'm not sure. Uh, and once they say we will abide, I don't know if, um, Ms. Encarnacion, if you'd like to provide additional information. The recommendation right now would be every two weeks.

0:50:38 Um, and of course, if, if Omicron continues to, to dissipate as it is, then of course, once a month, if we need to test more frequently, if the reason arises, we have the number of test kits available. And, um, our nurses in the school have always, uh, have also been trained on testing. And we've, we are now going into contractual arrangements with five, um, business entities throughout the territory who have, um, also agreed to test, um, individuals in the school systems as well. So we have, we have it pretty covered.

0:51:10 Very well. Commissioner, I noted in your, in your testimony that you made reference to the fact that the Department of Health, um, that you're prepared to work with the entity Sports Park and Recreation and Department of Education. Uh, can you speak to what is, what is the current engagement? Um, because I just take, when I, when I read that you are prepared to do it, um, you know, leave me to wonder whether or not it's being done. Um, can you just expand on that a little bit for me, please?

0:51:41 Okay. For, um, one of the things that, that, um, needs to happen and, um, Commissioner Barry Benjamin spoke about protocols and, and, and policies. Of course, when they're presented, we are going to be reviewing those protocols and policies to make sure they're fitting the guidelines for COVID-19. But the preparation that I was speaking about has already begun. Um, in, in my testimony also, we spoke about, um, 10,000 students as well as 2,000 faculty and staff that within, um, from last week and going forward to next week, as we are staggering the beginning of school, we've started that and I think it's been very successful. Um, Dr. Ellis has the correct number of positive tests that we've seen. While we are, while we've been testing, but we tested Saturday and Sunday and, and those two days we saw, we saw 72 positives. So I felt that even if we saw one positive, it would have been worth all those tests.

0:52:37 So we, um, we meet on ongoing basis. We met yesterday having to do with the vaccine drive that we're going to be working on. Um, I could check off the list, but, um, I think that, um, sometimes, um, we meet with education more than we meet with ourselves. So it's a coordinated effort and, um, it's, it's, it's up and running. We've started it last year, 2020 in June, and we haven't stopped. Very well.

0:53:03 Thank you. And, um, Commissioner Barry Benjamin, in respect to equipments, do we have, um, adequate and sufficient equipments in our schools right now? Um, to, I guess, uh, some, uh, time, obviously to engage our students in the athletic programs. Do we have the necessary equipment as well as the, uh, teachers, uh, to support the sports and events at these schools? Um, we, uh, we have to, uh, we have to, uh, we have to, uh, we have to do that. Um, we have to do that. Um, we have to do that. Um, we have to do that.

0:53:37 Um, we have to do that. And each one of our schools has a health and physical education teacher. [2 such phrases repeated 30 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

0:54:19 Um, our high schools have a boards of three to four. So we do have the adequate staffing in place as well. Thank you. Acting, acting superintendent. Can I ask you to be, um, if you have a timeline for the procurement and delivery of the sporting equipment? So I don't have an exact timeline, but I do know that our goal is to get it into our schools as soon as possible. Once we walk through the proper procurement process. Very well. And I don't need to belabor this, Mr. Chair. If I could just ask, um, is that for this school year or for next school year?

0:54:57 This and next school year. Very well. Thank you. We do have a staggered plan. Thank you. You're welcome, Senator Francis. Uh, Senator Saru, you're recognized for your seven minutes. Mr. Chair, and good afternoon to those testifying. Um, it came on the floor specifically because when you know better, you do better. And I would venture to say that I am the only division one athlete in this body politic. And the answers today are a bit nauseating.

0:55:39 And this is not for the Department of Health because the Department of Health, they're doing their job to protect the population from any outbreak or any fatal outcome that can happen from the pandemic. And Commissioner, correct me if I'm wrong, but you have one of the top tennis players during her time, but went to school on a full tennis scholarship as your assistant commissioner, correct? Correct.

0:56:12 Very pleased to say that. Yes. Senator, I'm no longer hearing. By means of Dr. Sims. And the testimony before- Senator, I'm no longer hearing. You can't hear me? No, no, we can. Can you hear me? No, no, we can. Can you hear me? No, no,

we can. Okay, now you can. I need about 20 seconds of my time, Mr. Chair.

- 0:56:43 And the testimony before some of the Department of Education, and I like to say they come for education, but I have to at this juncture. It's the same testimony, moreover, that was given the last time the Chair had a hearing on this very same topic. Everything is what will be done, but I can't identify what has been done. So, COVID is a new norm. And if we, when we wanted tourists to come to this territory, we created provisions. We created a portal in no time. We assembled a National Guard at the airport, and we found ways for tourists to come.
- 0:57:25 We wanted cruise ships to come to the dock. We lobbied and lobbied and lobbied and joined people's court cases and begged the CDC to allow cruise ships to come to our ports. We allowed bars and restaurants to ease restrictions because they are money makers. And the way that we have done our athletes in this territory is unconscionable. You're trying to tell me, we're talking about games, let's forget the games. When you had the bubble, and I watched the bubble, those athletes looked, for lack of a better word, not so good performing. And they looked not so good because they were out of shape. So, we focus on athletics and having a game, but every athlete knew that preparation begins off the court. So, in the time that these students have been home, Ms. Tomar, has the department procured training equipment to train in a COVID-safe environment?
- 0:58:26 Yes or no? Please hold the senators time. Commissioner Raquel Barry Benjamin, were you able to hear the senators? I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I thought she asked. I'm sorry. Senator, did you call my name? Yes. I'm sorry. I thought she asked. I'm sorry. Senator, did you call my name? Were you?
- 0:59:05 Yes. I'm hearing an echo, Senator. Commissioner, were you able to hear the senator's question? Or you need her to repeat the question? I heard the senators. Okay. Can I respond? Yes, you may. Okay. Sorry. I wasn't aware she called my name. No problem. I did hear part of her question, which spoke to if the department procured equipment to train in a COVID-safe environment? Correct. Equipment to train in a COVID-safe. Yes or no? I'm sorry, Senator.
- 0:59:35 Somebody has to fix the senator's mic is coming in spotty. It is. Let's take a one minute. Let's take a one minute recess and see if media can improve Senator Saro's mic, please, so it could come a little bit more clear. Thank you. The committee on Youth Sports Park and Recreation stands in one minute recess. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. The committee on Youth Sports Park and Recreation stands in one minute recess. It is. Let's take a one minute. Let's take a one minute recess and see if media can improve Senator Saro's mic please so he could come a little bit more clear. Thank you. The committee and youth sports park and recreation stands in one minute recess.
- 1:00:41 Thank you. The committee and youth sports park and recreation stands in one minute recess. [2 such phrases repeated 16 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

People named in this transcript

SUSPECTED, and a finding aid only. Names were matched by machine against the spellings used across all 426 of our transcripts, and the title is the one used in the room. Being named here is NOT evidence that a person attended or spoke · only that the name was said. Speech recognition mishears names, so a spelling may be wrong even where no alternative is offered.

- 30x **Senator Steven D. Payne Sr.**
heard in this transcript as: Payne, Steven D. Payne Sr
- 8x **Senator Carla Joseph**
the surname alone also matches: Clifford Joseph; Karla J. Joseph
heard in this transcript as: Joseph
- 5x **Commissioner Barry Benjamin**
heard in this transcript as: Berry Benjamin
- 4x **Senator Franklin D. Johnson**
heard in this transcript as: Franklin Johnson, Johnson
- 3x **Senator Dwayne DeGraff**
heard in this transcript as: DeGraff
- 3x **Senator Novelle Francis**
heard in this transcript as: Francis
- 3x **Senator Samuel Carrion**
heard in this transcript as: Carrion

2x

Senator Janelle K. Saro

heard in this transcript as: Saru