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**SENATOR JOSEPH EXPRESS CONCERNS ON VIDE PLANS FOR RALPH O
WHEATLEY SKILLS CENTER**

ST. THOMAS, USVI – Ahead of the Committee on Education and Workforce Development meeting held on Monday, Senator Carla Joseph wrote to the Commissioner of Education to express her deep concerns on the VI Department of Education's (VIDE) plans to relocate the Ralph O Wheatley Skill Center.

In her letter dated July 8, 2021, to the Honorable Raquel Berry-Benjamin, Senator Joseph noted that based on her walk-through inspection, the Gladys Abraham School would not be ready to receive students for the 2021-2022 school year. The Senator also stated:

- 1) The new proposed locations would adversely affect enrollment and attendance.
- 2) Gladys Abraham, condemned by the VIDE following the 2017 Category 5 hurricanes, requires significant remediation due to the facility's age and extensive damages.
- 3) Distance cost to commute and lack of reliable, timely transportation to the area will provide hardship, especially for students commuting from St. John.

As a solution, Senator Joseph recommended transforming vacant lots close to the original location into modular classrooms as an interim or possible permanent alternative. Locations recommended include:

- 1) 45A Estate Thomas, a vacant lot adjacent to the Roy Lester Schneider Hospital, and
- 2) Parcel #100-1 Estate Thomas, a vacant lot that was formerly the Warren E. Brown Apartments.

Commissioner Berry-Benjamin's letter dated Monday, July 12, 2021, to Senator Joseph updated the Senator on the repurposing of the center, now renamed the Charlotte Amalie High School

Annex. But, the letter offered no further discussion in addressing the Senator's concerns or alternative central locations.

Senator Joseph said, "The viability of the vocational-technical center is largely dependent upon the decisions made now by the Department of Education. We must maintain a standard of efficiency and build on the progress that the skill center has made over the years."

"I remain open to discussing relocation strategy with Commissioner Berry-Benjamin and her team to ensure ease of access for students of the Ralph O Wheatley Skills Center," the Senator concluded.

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