

BILL NO. _____

THIRTY-SECOND LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

REGULAR SESSION

2018

An Act to provide financial support for tuition free post-secondary education for residents of the Virgin Islands at the University of the Virgin Islands.

RECOMMENDED BY THE GOVERNOR

1 WHEREAS, the continuing education of the residents of the Territory remains an
2 extremely high priority of the Government of the U.S. Virgin Islands; and

3 WHEREAS, many talented graduates from Virgin Islands' public, private and parochial
4 high schools borrow huge sums of student loan money to attend colleges on the U.S. mainland;
5 and

6 WHEREAS, many of these students do not complete their post-secondary education for
7 lack of financial resources even after acquiring loans to complete the same; and

8 WHEREAS, many Virgin Islands' college students do not return to the Territory, depriving
9 the Virgin Islands workforce of talented and skilled individuals needed to contribute to the overall
10 economic growth and social enhancement of the community; and

11 WHEREAS, in September 2017, Hurricanes Irma and Maria ravaged the Territory causing
12 substantial damages to our infrastructure, including public and private schools and buildings,
13 thereby creating a greater need for a qualified workforce to rebuild the Territory; and

1 WHEREAS, the Virgin Islands economy continues to expand, putting a greater need on
2 the Government, the private sector and the not for profit community to recruit many qualified
3 individuals to fill vital employment positions now available throughout the Territory; and

4 WHEREAS, the need for qualified workers in the Virgin Islands has reached a level that
5 importing qualified workers from outside the Territory is fast becoming the norm rather than the
6 exception; and

7 WHEREAS, such losses in the Territory's workforce has required the Governor of the
8 Virgin Islands to take action by Executive Order to increase starting base salaries for teachers,
9 police officers, social workers, corrections officers, firefighters, social workers, Emergency
10 Medical Technicians, mental health professionals and other employees of the Government of the
11 Virgin Islands; and

12 WHEREAS, additional persons with appropriate credentials are needed to ensure that the
13 Territory can meet the demands of its recovery and growth of the economy; and

14 WHEREAS, these credentialed individuals need to be fully aligned with the employment
15 needs of the Territory, thereby requiring collaboration by education and workforce agencies at the
16 Territorial level; and

17 WHEREAS, the Territory already provides free tuition for eligible Veterans, Senior
18 Citizens and full four-year scholarships to the Valedictorians and Salutatorians who graduate from
19 a secondary high school or the Adult Continuing Education Program in the U.S. Virgin Islands to
20 attend the University of the Virgin Islands; and

21 WHEREAS, providing financial assistance to eligible residents of the Territory to acquire
22 a post-secondary education from an accredited institution of higher learning is in the overall best
23 interest of the citizens of the Virgin Islands; and

1 WHEREAS, the U.S. Virgin Islands ranks very low in the number of its residents who
2 obtain college degrees, with only 11.4% of its residents obtaining college degrees, placing the
3 Territory behind all states in the Nation; and

4 WHEREAS, providing financial assistance to eligible residents of the U. S. Virgin Islands
5 to attend the University of the Virgin Islands will drastically increase the percentage of Virgin
6 Islanders acquiring post-secondary degrees; and,

7 WHEREAS, such financial assistance to acquire this level of workforce development will
8 be a first for any Territory of the United States, following the lead of only two other States that
9 provide tuition-free Bachelor's degrees, and would be the first Historically Black College and
10 University ("HBCU") in the nation to offer free tuition to residents of its home state/Territory;

11 NOW, THEREFORE,

12 ***Be it Enacted by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands:***

13 SECTION 1. Title 17, Virgin Islands Code, Chapter 33 is hereby amended to add an
14 appropriately numbered section establishing the Virgin Islands Workforce Development
15 Scholarship Program to read as follows:

16 "____. Virgin Islands Workforce Development Scholarship Program

17 (a) This section shall be referred to as the V.I. Workforce Development Scholarship Program.

18 (b) The V.I. Workforce Development Scholarship Program shall be available only to residents
19 of the U. S. Virgin Islands who matriculate in a non-online degree programs offered at the
20 University of the Virgin Islands, subject to the level of funding provided by the
21 Government of the Virgin Islands of the United States.

22 (c) The V.I. Workforce Development Scholarship Program shall be administered by the
23 University of the Virgin Islands.

1 (d) The V.I. Workforce Development Scholarship Program shall be limited to the first 1,700
2 students who apply and meet all qualifications for the scholarship as provided in this
3 section. The date of receipt of the application shall determine the order in which each
4 applicant will be considered for the scholarship.

5 (e) An applicant who qualifies for the V.I. Workforce Development Scholarship Program
6 shall:

7 (1) Be a U.S. citizen or a permanent resident of the United States;

8 (2) Be a bona fide resident domiciled in the U.S. Virgin Islands at the time he or she files
9 an application for admission to the University of the Virgin Islands;

10 (3) Is a member of a household where the combined household income is not greater than
11 the product of \$31,250.00 times the number of individuals in the household where
12 such individuals must either be the head of household or a dependent of the head of
13 household for income tax purposes and where the combined household income does
14 not exceed the following:

15 a. Household on one (1) person: \$31,250.00

16 b. Household of two (2) persons: \$62,250.00

17 c. Household of three (3) persons: \$93,750.00

18 d. Household of four (4) persons: \$125,000.00

19 e. Household of five (5) persons: \$156,250.00

20 f. Household of six (6) persons: \$187,500.00

21 g. Household of seven (7) persons: \$218,750.00

22 h. Household of eight (8) persons: \$250,000.00

1 No person is eligible for the V.I. Workforce Development Scholarship Program whose
2 combined household income exceeds \$250,000.00;

3 (4) Be a graduate of a U.S. Virgin Islands public, private, parochial, Adult Continuing
4 Education program, or of a certified home school program in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

5 However, any high school graduate who has been displaced due to a natural disaster
6 and graduates from a high school outside of the Territory, but who maintains their
7 domicile in the U.S. Virgin Islands, shall be eligible for this scholarship;

8 (5) Must have applied for and completed a Free Application for Federal Student Aid
9 ("FAFSA") application, accepted all available federal financial aid awarded, and
10 accepted all other means of financial aid or grants, except loans;

11 (6) Apply for fulltime admission to the University of the Virgin Islands no later than
12 February 1 of the calendar year in which the student wishes to enroll, and must make
13 a deposit indicating an intention to attend by May 1 of that same year;

14 (7) Attend the University of the Virgin Islands on a fulltime, matriculated basis
15 maintaining a minimum of 12 credit hours per semester;

16 (8) Remain in good academic standing based on existing academic rules at the University
17 of the Virgin Islands and maintain a Grade Point Average of not less than 2.0 per
18 semester; and,

19 (9) Agree to provide not less than 100 hours of community service per semester in the
20 U.S. Virgin Islands in a not for profit community organization, or within a department
21 or agency of the Government of the Virgin Islands as determined by the University of
22 the Virgin Islands through a work study intern program or community service sites as
23 determined by the University.

1 (f) The V.I. Workforce Development Scholarship Program must be used for a student
2 obtaining his or her first degree, which shall be an Associate's or Bachelor's Degree, or
3 both, but only up to 122 credit hours, or 132 in exceptional circumstances as determined
4 by the University of the Virgin Islands.

5 (g) The scholarship recipient shall matriculate at the University of the Virgin Islands no later
6 than the fall semester one year after accepting the scholarship. Any person accepting the
7 scholarship shall be required to attend the University of the Virgin Islands as a full-time
8 student for the duration of the scholarship. If the student transfers to another college or
9 university, or leaves the University of the Virgin Islands, the scholarship will immediately
10 terminate. No benefit of the scholarship is transferrable to any other University in or
11 outside the U.S. Virgin Islands.

12 (h) Any person granted a scholarship under the provisions of this section shall be required, as
13 a prior condition to receiving such scholarship, to execute an agreement or other binding
14 commitment acknowledging that as a condition for the receipt of the scholarship, he or she
15 will accept professional employment within the U.S. Virgin Islands following graduation
16 for at least one (1) year for every two (2) years of matriculation in the field the student
17 pursued education and training under the scholarship or in a field which bears some
18 relationship to the recipient's course of study. The scholarship recipient must use his/her
19 best efforts to obtain employment in the same field, or reasonably related field, as the
20 recipient's course of study in the U.S. Virgin Islands within six (6) months following
21 graduation, unless such period is extended for not more than six (6) months at the discretion
22 of the University of the Virgin Islands. If the student enters a post-baccalaureate program,
23 the three-year commitment is tolled until the student completes that post-baccalaureate

1 program. The agreement shall also include a provision stating that if the scholarship
2 recipient fails to comply with the provisions of this subsection and a position is available
3 in a field which bears some relationship to the recipient's course of study, and the recipient
4 is not pursuing a post-baccalaureate program; or the recipient does not complete the
5 Associate's and/or Bachelor's degree program and graduate, the scholarship will then
6 become a loan, payable to the V.I. Workforce Development Fund at the statutory interest
7 rate in the U.S. Virgin Islands at the time the scholarship was granted. Such payments shall
8 be made to the University of the Virgin Islands who shall forward all payments to the
9 Commissioner of Finance for deposit into the V.I. Workforce Development Fund.

10 **SECTION 2.** There is established in Title 33, Virgin Islands Code, and chapter 111, an
11 appropriately numbered section to read as follows:

12 "_____The V.I. Workforce Development Scholarship Fund.

13 (1) The V.I. Workforce Development Scholarship Fund shall be funded by an annual
14 appropriation of \$3,000,000.00 from the Internal Revenue Matching Fund of the
15 Government of the Virgin Islands commencing Fiscal Year 2019. Appropriations to
16 the Fund from the Internal Revenue Matching Fund shall continue fiscal year to fiscal
17 year and shall remain available until expended. All private charitable and federal
18 grants, and any other scholarship donations or bequeaths to the University shall not
19 affect the Government's annual appropriations to the V.I. Workforce Development
20 Scholarship Fund except that should the Fund achieve an unexpended balance of
21 \$5,000,000.00, the appropriation for that fiscal year shall be waived. Each year the
22 University of the Virgin Islands is authorized to use up to eight percent (8%) of the

1 funds appropriated by the Government for administrative costs to administer the V.I.
2 Workforce Development Scholarship Program.

3 (2) The Fund shall be maintained and administered by the Commissioner of the
4 Department of Finance who shall make disbursements to the University of the Virgin
5 Islands upon substantiated requests for drawdowns.

6
7 **BILL SUMMARY**

8 This bill provides postsecondary financial assistance for matriculated full-time students at
9 the University of the Virgin Islands by establishing a scholarship program to be known as the
10 Virgin Islands Workforce Development Scholarship Program. Section 1 sets forth the
11 qualifications for the scholarship program, which will be solely administered by the University of
12 the Virgin Islands, and establishes a requirement that the scholarship recipient commits to working
13 in the Territory for a certain period of time after graduation. Section 2 of the bill establishes the
14 V.I. Workforce Development Scholarship Fund to be administered by the Commissioner of
15 Finance, who will transfer funds to the University as requested by the University of the Virgin
16 Islands.