



# THE VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **PUBLIC ENCOURAGED TO HELP PROMOTE SCHOOL BUS SAFETY ACROSS THE TERRITORY**

ST. THOMAS, USVI – The Virgin Islands Department of Education invites the public to participate in School Bus Safety Month in October and School Bus Safety Week, October 22-26, 2018.

As motorists traverse the Territory's roadways, Owen Hennemann and Laverne Cannonier-Hill, school bus safety field inspectors in the St. Croix and St. Thomas-St. John districts, respectively, ask residents to consider ways they can help keep students safe.

Hennemann said a significant threat students faces is the failure of motorists to stop when school buses are loading and unloading students.

"V.I. Code title 20 section 495(e) tells the motorist to stop no closer than ten feet in front or behind the school bus when the flashing red lights are on and the stop sign is displayed," he explained. "When a motorist violates this law, a student can get injured."

Cannonier-Hill also highlighted an overlooked danger students place themselves in when entering or exiting the school bus.

"When children stoop to pick up items in the road, they are less visible to the bus driver and other motorists," she said. "They put themselves at greater risk of getting knocked down."

According to School Busing, Inc., an organization based on St. Thomas that provides contracted school busing services to the Department of Education, the entire Virgin Islands community, including students themselves, has a role to play in school bus safety. The organization pointed

out that students can help keep each other safe by avoiding rambunctious play both while waiting for and riding in the bus.

Officials from School Busing, Inc. also pointed out that school bus drivers are served with the monumental task of keeping students safe while operating a large motor vehicle. While they are vastly overlooked, the organization said school bus drivers are a crucial part of student success, as they ensure students make it to school so they can learn.

Other school bus safety hazards students, parents and the community should be aware of is bullying and the size of students' school bags.

"Bullying is a major problem for bus riders," Hennemann noted. "All adults need to work together to prevent this problem- drivers, parents and school staff."

Canonier-Hill said large-sized school bags can also pose a danger.

"[Students'] school bags are either too big or too heavy for them," she said. "The buses are designed to sit three to a row and the sizes of their bags hinder them from fitting more than two in a row. Students are supposed to sit with their bags on their laps and large bags or roller bags make this difficult."

She said roller bags are usually situated in the aisle, "which creates an obstruction. This can become an issue if students need to get off the bus, especially in the case of an emergency."

Canonier-Hill further highlighted the important role parents play in ensuring their children are transported safely to and from school.

"Talk to your children daily to remind them to be respectful of the driver and to listen to the instructions of the driver," she said.

School Busing, Inc., offered more ways the community can promote school bus safety year round:

- When the school bus stop sign is deployed, stop 10 feet in front or behind of the school bus to allow students to safely board or disembark from the bus.
- Be sure to leave home on time so you are not tempted to pass the bus when it is carrying our precious students. Drive like your children are on the bus.
- Be aware of students walking along the roadside. Sidewalks are not always available on Virgin Islands' roads. Please be cautious as you drive and keep an eye out for students.
- Parents must ensure their contact information with the school is current and that students also know their parents' contact information.
- Students must be aware of their stop and parents are encouraged to help first-time riders identify their stop.
- Parents should establish a relationship with their child's bus driver. It is crucial for parents to become familiar with the number of the bus that transports their children to and from school, and to be present at the bus stop during pick up/drop off times.

For more information, please contact the Office of Public Relations at (340) 774-0100 ext. 8136.

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