



36TH LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS
Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance

Honorable Senator Novelle E Francis, Jr.
Chair

Testimony Presented By
The Honorable Justa Encarnacion, RN, BSN, MBA/HCM
Commissioner of Health

on

Bill No. 36-0334 An act appropriating \$20,000 from the Budget Stabilization Fund to the Virgin Islands Department of Health for the repair and replacement of the air conditioning system serving the Maternal Child Health Unit and the Division of Children with Special Needs on St. Thomas

1 Good day, Honorable Novelle E. Francis, Jr., Chair of the Committee on Budget, Appropriations
2 and Finance; Vice Chair, Honorable Marvin A. Blyden; Committee members; non-committee
3 members; and the viewing and listening audience. I am Dr. Janis Valmond, Deputy Commissioner,
4 testifying on behalf of the Honorable Justa Encarnacion, Commissioner for the Virgin Islands
5 Department of Health. Joining me today are Mackiesh Taylor-Jones, Chief Legal Counsel;
6 La’Kiah Meade, Director of Maternal and Child Health and Children with Special Health Care
7 Needs; Mahalia Hodge, Chief Procurement Officer; and Cornelius JN Baptiste, Director of
8 Facilities Management.

9
10 The Virgin Islands Department of Health respectfully provides testimony in support of **Bill No.**
11 **36-0334**, which appropriates **\$20,000 from the Budget Stabilization Fund** for the repair and
12 replacement of the air-conditioning system serving the Maternal and Child Health and Children
13 with Special Health Care Needs (MCH/CSHCN) Program, Elaine co. Building located at Estate
14 Contant, St. Thomas, USVI. The Department sincerely appreciates the Legislature’s recognition
15 of this critical need and its continued support of our employees and the families we serve. This
16 appropriation represents an important investment toward restoring an appropriate clinical and
17 working environment for this essential program.

18 Since the beginning of calendar year 2026, the facility has experienced significant air-conditioning
19 challenges, resulting in increased heat and humidity throughout affected clinical and
20 administrative areas. These conditions impact not only Department employees, but also the
21 children and families who rely on the services provided at the facility. Timely corrective action is
22 therefore necessary to restore an appropriate working and service-delivery environment and
23 support the continuity of essential maternal and child health services.

24 Under the executed lease agreement, the Department, as Lessee, is responsible for the repair and
25 routine maintenance of the facility's air-conditioning systems. While the lease establishes this
26 responsibility, it does not provide a contractor or procurement mechanism through which the
27 required HVAC services can be obtained. Additionally, the Department has limited flexibility
28 within its existing resources to absorb the cost of significant HVAC repairs. Federal funding
29 remains subject to applicable grant requirements and allowable uses, while available General Fund
30 resources are committed to existing operational obligations. The proposed appropriation therefore
31 provides an important financial pathway for the Department to fulfill its responsibility to address

1 the HVAC deficiencies without redirecting limited programmatic resources from the essential
2 maternal and child health services provided to children and families throughout the Territory.

3 Throughout this period, the Department's Facilities Management Division has worked closely with
4 the MCH/CSHCN Program to assess the affected systems, mitigate immediate conditions, and
5 identify temporary and longer-term solutions. Portable air-conditioning units were explored;
6 however, venting requirements made their use impractical in certain areas. Facilities Management
7 instead implemented alternative measures, including strategically positioned fans to improve
8 airflow and circulate cooled air into affected spaces. While these measures have supported
9 continued operations, they are not a substitute for the necessary HVAC repairs.

10
11 Facilities Management received a preliminary quote totaling **\$15,680** to assist the Department in
12 establishing a reasonable planning estimate for the anticipated HVAC repairs. This preliminary
13 pricing was obtained solely to provide general financial direction and support budgeting
14 considerations and does not constitute an accepted bid, vendor selection, award, or commitment
15 by the Department to any specific company.

16
17 The proposed **\$20,000 appropriation** therefore represents a substantial and greatly appreciated
18 contribution toward addressing the identified HVAC need. To ensure that these public funds are
19 expended appropriately and in accordance with applicable procurement requirements, the
20 Department will utilize **GVIBUY** to solicit and evaluate competitive quotations for the required
21 HVAC repair and/or replacement services. Through that process, the final scope of work and
22 associated cost will be established and an award made in accordance with the Government of the
23 Virgin Islands' procurement requirements.

24
25 The Department again expresses its sincere appreciation to the 36th Legislature for its
26 responsiveness and for the proposed \$20,000 appropriation. We remain committed to working
27 collaboratively with the Legislature, Facilities Management, OPCMR, and the MCH/CSHCN
28 Program to resolve this matter as quickly and responsibly as possible. Thank you for the
29 opportunity to provide testimony on **Bill No. 36-0334** and for your continued partnership in
30 protecting the health and well-being of the people of the Virgin Islands.