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“Your Health is our **First** Priority”

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Senator Milton Potter, President of the 36<sup>th</sup> Legislature, and other members of the 36<sup>th</sup> Legislature, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Bill No. 36-0228. I strongly support this measure because it represents a critical investment in modernizing the healthcare infrastructure of the United States Virgin Islands, promotes data-driven policy making and strengthens the coordination of care across our Territory.

The Virgin Islands Health Data Utility (HDU) is essential for advancing a coordinated, efficient, and high-quality healthcare system. Secure interoperable data exchange enables providers, hospitals, behavioral health services, and public health agencies to access timely and accurate information, thereby improving clinical decision-making, reducing duplication of services, and strengthening continuity of care.

Bill No. 36-0228 also promotes responsible fiscal stewardship by helping to contain costs and strengthen Medicaid program oversight. Reducing duplication of services, improving utilization monitoring, and supporting interoperability of Medicaid data enhances program integrity and aligns the Territory with federal expectations. Finally, the HDU strengthens the territory’s disaster readiness and system resilience. Ensuring that health information remains accessible during hurricanes, cyber incidents, or other disasters is critical for a geographically dispersed and resource-constrained region such as the USVI.

I fully support Bill No. 36-0228 as it positions the Territory to improve health outcomes, increase operational efficiency, and build a more resilient, transparent, and sustainable healthcare system for the people of the United States Virgin Islands.

Tess G. Richards, M.D.