

# FREDERIKSTED HEALTH CARE, INC.

• INGEBORG NESBITT CLINIC IN FREDERIKSTED •

NORTHSHORE HEALTH CENTER • LENA SCHULTERBRANT MID ISLAND • DENTAL EAST

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Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance

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Budget Testimony FY2024

Frederiksted Health Care, Inc.

Good Afternoon Honorable Senator Donna Frett Gregory, Chairwoman of the Committee on Finance, other Committee members, all other Senators and our listening and viewing audience. My name is Masserae Sprauve Webster. I am the Chief Executive Officer of Frederiksted Health Care, Inc., otherwise referred to as FHC. I am here today to testify on behalf of the Board of Directors of Frederiksted Health Care, our staff, and our patients. With me today is Ms. Jacquelynn Rhymer-George, Chief Financial Officer of FHC.

Frederiksted Health Care is a non-profit organization which was created in 2000 to provide primary care services on St. Croix. FHC is a Federally qualified community health center funded under Section 330 of the Public Health Service Act. Recently, the Board of Directors and staff of Frederiksted Health Care completed a 3-year

strategic plan and rewrote our vision for St. Croix. We chose a vision that focuses on the health of our community but also acknowledges the spirit of our Caribbean people and the challenges of living in our tropical environment. Our work is to help our community reach this vision:

A Healthy,  
Vibrant, Resilient  
Community

Frederiksted Health Care will spend the next three years increasing access to services with dental and mental health as our top priorities. Our goal is to create comprehensive, one-stop-shop health centers with medical, dental, and behavioral health services, all available at the same location, and integrating services more fully.

When we developed our vision, we included “resilient” as part of the statement in recognition of the many challenges our community faces – little did we know that just a few weeks later we would come to work to find a pipe had burst on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Ingeborg Nesbitt Community Health Center building in the heart of Frederiksted. We would like to publicly thank our staff who jumped in with buckets and mops and worked tirelessly to clean up the damages. Unfortunately, our contractor has informed us that repairs will not be completed until the end of August 2023. We have routed our patients to our other FHC locations. We are lucky to have recently opened the Lena Schulerbrandt Community Health Center in Sunshine Mall! Thus, we are not creating too much of a challenge for our patients that reside on the west end of St. Croix. We also offer Thanks to Stericil International and VI Partners for Healthy Communities who have accommodated some of our staff in their offices.

We are happy to report that our operations have returned to near normal following the COVID-19 public health emergency. Although our patient population has not fully recovered, we expect to return to 2019 levels both in patients and visits by the end of 2023. We are proud to inform you that one in four residents of St. Croix are patients of Frederiksted Health Care. Our expansion of new locations over the past several years has resulted in an even distribution of patients across the three major population centers on St. Croix; with about a third of our patients living in Christiansted, Kings Hill and Frederiksted. We believe that health care should be available around the corner for our patients - persons that are sick, pregnant or elderly, should not have the additional challenges of traversing across the island to seek health care!

Frederiksted Health Care is available to provide services to everyone – with a particular focus on those whose income or insurance status limits their options. Our Payor Sources represent 53% Medicaid, 15% Medicare and 17% Commercial Insurance. The revenue we generate from providing services to these individuals, added to our Federal grants and V.I. allotment enable us to provide care to the remaining 25% of our patients who are uninsured. In 2022, this included almost 1,500 individuals who paid very little or nothing for their care. Because Medicare and many commercial insurance policies do not cover dental, the uninsured rate rises to 35% of our dental patients. Frederiksted Health Care, never turns away a patient due to inability to pay for services.

When I last presented to you, I was proud to discuss our comprehensive services and our five service delivery locations. Since that time, we were notified by our landlord that the lease for our Dental East location would not be renewed. This location had four dental operatories and was critical to our dental services. We are shifting much

of those services to our new dental suite at the Lena Schulerbrandt Community Health Center, however LSHC, only has three operatories. Our intention was not to replace but expand Dental Services. We are in the process of renovating our dental suite at Ingeborg Nesbitt Community Health Center from two to three operatories, however the water line break has interrupted progress on the dental suite renovation. As a result, we are currently down 6 dental operatories across our system. This is a crucial loss, that our community cannot afford; as dental is the highest unmet health care need on St. Croix. We are currently working to identify a new location in the Christiansted area for dental services.

We continue to provide comprehensive services. Within our patient population, there were several subpopulations of individuals who are even more vulnerable including 85 individuals who are being treated for HIV/AIDS, and 128 individuals who are chronically homeless. Frederiksted Health Care is known to be a safe and welcoming environment for all including these marginalized groups. We provided prenatal care to 390 women as they prepared to give birth to the next generation of Crucians. We cared for almost 160 children under the age of 1 and almost 2000 individuals aged 65 and over. It is our honor and our responsibility to provide care to the most vulnerable among us.

The past few months have been very busy for us at Frederiksted Health Care. The Health Resources and Services Administration conducted an operational site visit as part of the Health Center Program. This three-day compliance inspection evaluated all aspects of our operations. We are happy to report that we are fully compliant with all Health Center Program requirements. We were also inspected by the Commission on Dental Accreditation as a clinical training site for the New York Langone University Dental Medicine Postdoctoral Residency Program. This

program allows us to stretch our capacity as our dental preceptors provide valuable training to the next generation of safety-net dental providers. We are the only certified dental residency program in the Virgin Islands.

We completed the Patient Centered Medical Home recertification process for Ingeborg Nesbitt, Mid Island and North Shore locations and we submitted an initial application for Lena Schulterbrandt. We are proud to share that the 3 sites were renewed and our initial application for LSHC was approved. These four locations are the only Patient Centered Medical Homes certified by the National Committee on Quality Assurance in the Virgin Islands. We also submitted our annual renewal application for Federal Tort Claims Act coverage which has been awarded through the end of 2024. This coverage requires extensive risk management and quality improvement systems in the health center to ensure high quality outcomes for our patients.

We are presently in the midst of our Financial Audits which has always been Clean. We expect the same report at the completions of this audit.

These positive reviews and accreditations would not be possible without a commitment to quality from our Board of Directors and our staff. We monitor over twenty outcome measures on a regular basis as part of our regular quality assessment process. We take active steps when our outcomes fall below our high standards. This has resulted in several of our outcomes ranked in the top quartile of health centers in the United States including early entry into prenatal care, low birth weight, depression remission, and diabetes outcomes.

While we have realized much success over the past year, our challenges remain great. The Health Resources and Services Administration estimated there are approximately 15,000 low-income individuals living on St. Croix who are without access to care – Frederiksted Health Care would have to more than double in size to reach all of these individuals! The HRSA has developed a tool to measure and map unmet needs for health services in the United States, This map shows virtually all of St. Croix to be in the highest category of need. This score considers a variety of factors including poverty level, diabetes prevalence, childhood immunization rates, health center penetration rate, life expectancy, low birth weight, lack of a high school diploma, obesity, smoking, early childhood mortality and lack of health insurance, to name a few.

News from the 2020 census has not been good – it shows the median household income in the Virgin Islands has actually decreased by 9.1% from the previous census. Our median household income is only 60% that of the United States national median household income. The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System found that 22% of adults in the Virgin Islands have deferred health care due to cost compared to just 12% in the United States in general. 31% had no routine check-up in the last 12 months, compared to just 23% in the United States. 35% of adults aged 18-65 in the Virgin Islands do not have health care coverage, compared to just 13% in the United States without health coverage.

A study published in 2022 by the National Hazards Center mapped socio-economic vulnerability on St. Croix. The darker areas indicate higher socio-economic vulnerabilities in the population. Our Sites are all located in these darker areas to make access easy for the most vulnerable among us.

We expect to see more demand for our services as a result of these declining socio-economic conditions. We would like to share, that you will soon see construction activity at our North Shore location; as we break ground on a new building. This building will house: behavioral health, outreach services and administrative offices. This will make available valuable space in our health centers at North Shore and Ingeborg Nesbitt to increase clinical services to meet this increasing need.

Some of you, may remember that I shared this slide with you last year, in my budget testimony. In the past year, we at Frederiksted Health Care have given considerable thought to this picture. At our strategic planning retreat, we rewrote our vision and mission statements and reconsidered our values as an organization. The knowledge that our island is faced with many health disparities weighs heavy on our organization and we considered the concepts of equality and equity as it applies to health care. Our strategic planning group originally included equity as one of our core organizational values. However, by the end of our retreat, reconsidered and replaced equity with LIBERATION as we strive to remove all barriers to health care on St. Croix for everyone.

We close today by requesting an ongoing funding allotment in the amount of \$2.7 million. We seek this funding without requesting an increase over the 2023 allotment. FHC pledges to continue to stretch our limited resources to the maximum extent possible.

We do not ask our allotment as a grant or as a gift, but as payment for the services that we provide. We take this opportunity to remind this body that the allotment provided has not kept pace with the level of services we provide in response to the needs of our community. Senators, your support is paramount as we seek to continue

to provide services; and do our part to move our community from disadvantage through equality and equity towards the ultimate goal of liberation.

We look forward to working with this body on our important mission. Ms. Rhymer-George and I remain poised to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully Submitted,



Masserae Sprauve Webster

Chief Executive Officer