

BILL NO. 35-0029

Thirty- Fifth Legislature of the Virgin Islands

February 27, 2023

An Act honoring and commending Donna Marie Christian-Christiansen M.D., for her tireless contributions to the people of the Virgin Islands in the medical field and representation in the United States Congress

PROPOSED BY: Senators Novelle E. Francis, Jr. and Angel L. Bolques, Jr.

1 **WHEREAS**, Donna Marie Christian-Christensen is the daughter of the late Judge
2 Almeric Christian and Virginia Sterling Christian and the granddaughter of the late esteemed
3 Virgin Islands educator Elena Christian; and

4 **WHEREAS**, Ms. Christian-Christiansen is the mother of two daughters, Rabiah Green
5 George and Karida Green and the grandmother of Nia Elena Hamilton, Kobe George, Layla
6 Maria George and Nealia Williams; and

7 **WHEREAS**, Ms. Christian-Christiansen earned a Bachelor of Science in 1966 at St.
8 Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana, and an M.D. (Doctor of Medicine) in 1970 from
9 George Washington University School of Medicine in Washington, D.C.; and

10 **WHEREAS**, Ms. Christian-Christiansen interned at Pacific Medical Center in San
11 Francisco, California from 1970 to 1971; and

12 **WHEREAS**, Ms. Christian-Christiansen did her residency in family medicine at Howard
13 University Medical Center from 1973 to 1974 before returning to the U.S. Virgin Islands; and

1 **WHEREAS**, Ms. Christian-Christensen became a board-certified physician in 1977; and

2 **WHEREAS**, Dr. Christian-Christiansen first became politically active in the 1980s as
3 part of the Coalition to Appoint A Native Judge, which emphasized judicial appointments from
4 within the Virgin Islands community and later as part of the Save Fountain Valley Coalition,
5 which called for the protection of St. Croix's north side from overdevelopment; and

6 **WHEREAS**, as a private physician in Family Practice in the U.S. Virgin Islands for 20
7 years, from 1975 to 1996, Dr. Christian-Christiansen was aware of the challenges that the
8 underserved population encountered as they tried to access quality health care; and

9 **WHEREAS**, during that time, Dr. Christian-Christiansen concurrently served the Virgin
10 Islands Department of Health as an Emergency Room physician, Maternal and Child Health
11 physician, Medical Director of the Ingeborg Nesbitt Clinic, Director of the Frederiksted Health
12 Center, Director of Maternal Child Health and Family Planning, Medical Director of the Juan
13 Luis Hospital, and Territorial Assistant Commissioner of Health; and

14 **WHEREAS**, Dr. Christian-Christensen continued to delve into politics and advocacy
15 and served as the Democratic National Committeewoman from 1984 to 1994, as Vice-Chair of
16 the Territorial Committee of the Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands, as a Delegate to
17 Democratic National Conventions, and on the Platform Committee of the Democratic National
18 Committee. She also served on the Virgin Islands Board of Education from 1984 to 1986 and
19 on the Virgin Islands Status Commission from 1988 to 1982; and

20 **WHEREAS**, Dr. Christian-Christensen also served as the President of the Virgin Islands
21 Medical Institute, and as a Trustee of the National Medical Association; and

22 **WHEREAS**, Dr. Christian-Christiansen was elected to serve as the territory's Delegate
23 to Congress in 1996; and

24 **WHEREAS**, Delegate Christian-Christiansen was the first female physician to serve as
25 a member of the U.S. Congress, the first woman to represent an offshore territory, and the first
26 woman delegate from the U.S. Virgin Islands; and

1 **WHEREAS**, Delegate Christian- Christensen served nine consecutive terms, from 1997
2 to 2014, as Delegate to Congress from the United States Virgin Islands; and

3 **WHEREAS**, during her tenure, Delegate Christian-Christensen served on several
4 committee and sub-committees of the U.S. House of Representatives, most notably on the
5 Committee on Energy and Commerce and its Subcommittee on Health; Committee on Natural
6 Resources and its Subcommittee on Insular Affairs and National Parks; Committee on
7 Homeland Security and Committee on Small Business; and

8 **WHEREAS**, soon after her election to Congress, Delegate Christian-Christensen was
9 named the Chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus' Health Braintrust, which brought
10 together experts in minority health from across the world to discuss, deliberate on and craft
11 policy and legislative initiatives on all levels of government; and

12 **WHEREAS**, Delegate Christian-Christensen chaired the CBC Health Braintrust for 15
13 years; and

14 **WHEREAS**, during Delegate Christian-Christiansen's tenure, the CBC Health
15 Braintrust addressed a myriad of issues to include the disparities that confront minorities as
16 they try to access the health care system, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, substance abuse and its
17 effects, the need for more minority physicians and health care professionals, and the need for
18 affordable, accessible health care for all; and

19 **WHEREAS**, it was through this role as Chair of the CBC Health Braintrust that Delegate
20 Christian-Christensen was recognized for her role in not only increasing critical funding for
21 HIV/AIDS and other minority health issues to the U.S. territories and to communities of color
22 around the country, but to the countries across the Caribbean; and

23 **WHEREAS**, Delegate Donna Marie Christian-Christiansen was critical in gaining an
24 increasing amount of Medicaid funding for the territories, as a means of improving access to
25 healthcare; and

1 **WHEREAS**, as a result of her service as a physician and a former member of Congress
2 Donna Marie Christian-Christensen is known locally, nationally, and internationally as an
3 advocate for minority health; and

4 **WHEREAS**, Delegate Christian-Christensen, as a member of the Subcommittee on
5 Health, was instrumental in obtaining funding for telehealth, information technology and
6 comparative research to reduce healthcare costs in the territory; and

7 **WHEREAS**, Delegate Christian-Christensen was influential in advocating for minority
8 health in the Affordable Care Act; and

9 **WHEREAS**, Delegate Christian-Christensen received major awards because of her
10 health care advocacy; and

11 **WHEREAS**, in 1999, Delegate Christian-Christensen's alma mater, The George
12 Washington University, honored her as a distinguished alumnus; and

13 **WHEREAS**, in 2001, Delegate Christian-Christensen received an Honorary Doctor of
14 Laws from Moravian College in Bethlehem, PA; and

15 **WHEREAS**, in 2003, Delegate Christian-Christensen was honored by the National
16 Institutes of Health with the National Library of Medicine's Changing Face of Medicine
17 Award; and

18 **WHEREAS**, that same year, Delegate Christian-Christensen also received an Honorary
19 Doctor of Science degree from St. George's University in Grenada; and

20 **WHEREAS**, in 2010, Delegate Christian-Christensen received the Dr. Nathan Davis
21 Outstanding U.S. Representative Award from the American Medical Association; and

22 **WHEREAS**, in 2011, Delegate Christian-Christensen received a Leadership Award
23 from the Caribbean HIV/AIDS Conference in Bahamas for her role in extending PEPFAR
24 funds to the Caribbean; and

25 **WHEREAS**, that same year, Delegate Christian-Christensen gave the Inaugural Lecture
26 at the University of the Virgin Islands Caribbean Exploratory Research Center; and

1 **WHEREAS**, throughout her career, Delegate Christian-Christensen combined her love
2 of medicine and health care with her passion and skill in politics; and

3 **WHEREAS**, Dr. Christian-Christensen continues to be an active member of the local
4 and national Democratic party; and

5 **WHEREAS**, Dr. Christian-Christensen’s public service to her community includes: a
6 member and officer of several community organizations such as the Queen Louise Home, the
7 St. Croix Environmental Association, the Women’s Coalition of St. Croix, the St. Croix Central
8 High PTA, the Caribbean Dance Company, the Caribbean Studies Association, the Caribbean
9 Youth Organization and the Faith Moravian Church; and

10 **WHEREAS**, in retirement, Dr. Christian-Christensen has served as a health policy
11 advisor to the Virgin Islands Department of Health providing critical counsel during the
12 Coronavirus pandemic; Now Therefore,

13 ***Be it enacted by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands:***

14 **SECTION 1.** The Legislature of the Virgin Islands, on behalf of the people of the Virgin
15 Islands, honors and commends Donna Marie Christian-Christiansen, M.D., for her service to
16 the Virgin Islands community both in the medical field and in the U.S. House of
17 Representatives.

18 **SECTION 2.** The President of the Legislature, or the President’s designee, shall present
19 a perma plaque copy of this Act to Donna Marie Christian-Christensen M.D., or a designee, at
20 an appropriate ceremony.

21 **SECTION 3.** The Charles Harwood Memorial Complex, once demolished and rebuilt,
22 shall be renamed the “The Donna M. Christian-Christensen M.D. Virgin Islands Department
23 of Public Health”.

24 **SECTION 4.** The Department of Health shall place a sign bearing the inscription “The
25 Donna M. Christian-Christensen M.D. Virgin Islands Department of Public Health” at the
26 entrance to the Complex. If the Department of Health relocates to another location, the

1 successor building must carry the name “The Donna M. Christian-Christensen M.D., Virgin
2 Islands Department of Public Health.”

3 **SECTION 5.** (a) The sum of \$5000.00 is appropriated in the fiscal year ending
4 September 30, 2023 from the General Fund of the Virgin Islands to the Department of Health
5 to erect the appropriate signage.

6 (b) The funds appropriated in subsection (a) shall remain available until expended.

7 **BILL SUMMARY**

8 This bill honors and commends the Honorable Donna Marie Christian-Christiansen,
9 M.D. for her unselfish and dedicated service to the people of the Virgin Islands in the Medical
10 Field and as Congressional Representative to the people of the Virgin Islands and renames the
11 Charles Harwood Memorial Complex on the island of St. Croix as the “Donna M. Christian-
12 Christiansen Virgin Islands Department of Public Health” in her honor.

13 **BR23-0150/January 19, 2023/AA**