

Good day Senator Carla Joseph and members of the Committee for Veterans,

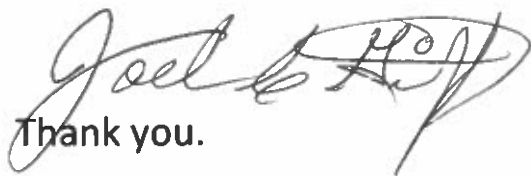
Thank you for the opportunity to speak and air my concerns as a member of the Veteran community. I'd first like to begin by thanking this committee for the great work they've done in providing resources and opportunities for Veterans in the Virgin Islands. However, there is still one major area that I feel has been dismissed for too long—reimbursement for medical-based travel to Florida.

As we all know, one of the limitations of living in these beautiful Virgin Islands is the lack of sufficient healthcare. In fact, for most of my medical care, I must seek treatment off island. I think it is only fair that as Veterans, we are able to seek the best level of care possible. Traveling to Florida provides access to care that is not limited by the language barriers or prejudices that are often experienced in Puerto Rico. This is not to diminish the competency of the healthcare providers in Puerto Rico; however, I would hope that it would be a priority for all of us to see that our Veterans receive care in places that make them feel safe, valued, and respected. Current policy states that transport is covered to the nearest VA hospital, but for the reasons previously mentioned, I think it is important that we appeal to Washington to amend that policy.

Years ago, Elroy George of the Department of Labor noticed an area of need for Veterans who were not hurt while surviving, but needed assistance for healthcare, nonetheless. For 12 years, under 4 administrations, reimbursements for medical travel were in place to assist Veterans. Under this new administration, it was cut. This did not stop us from having to travel to the mainland, it just made the process harder, and in some cases, impossible.

Director Patrick Farrell has now made it available for us to travel to the US to seek care in the Veterans hospital. However, instead of 100% reimbursement, we only receive \$250 towards our airline ticket. With inflation and the price of tickets steadily increasing, this \$250 is nowhere near enough. Between transport, housing, and medical bills, travel costs are daunting. We are just asking for help to ease the burden. The money is in the budget, and it should be used to the fullest to assist Veterans. No money should be returned when there are Veterans in need.

I served to deserve better.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joel H. H. H.', written in a cursive style.

Thank you.