

The Honorable Ray Fonseca
Chairperson on Committee on Health, Hospitals, & Human Services
Capitol Building, P.O. Box 1690
Charlotte Amalie, V.I. 00804

May 29th, 2024

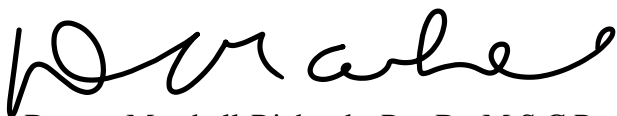
Pleasant Good day Mr. Chairman of the Committee on Health, Hospitals, & Human Services, all senators present, and to the listening and viewing public. I am Dr. Denese Marshall, a licensed clinical psychologist, and the CEO of Dr. Marshall's Consulting Services, LLC providing psychological services to children, adolescents, and adults in St. Croix. Over the many years of providing psychological services to the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands, I have also held other positions that has allowed me to provide psychological services to individuals over the years who has experienced behavioral, emotional, and intellectual disabilities when I was the Director of the Division of Mental Health, Alcoholism, & Drug Dependency Services, the Director of the Forensic Unit for the Department of Justice, and as the Police Psychologist for the Virgin Islands Police Department for the past 14 years. Today, I am here to testify on behalf of my experience with interfacing with individuals who have sought out my professional psychological services in my private practice.

Individuals who normally seek my services are parents with children with behavioral and emotional disorders who require professional psychological services. I also see adults with serious mental illnesses, those who suffer with mood disorders and anxiety, and individuals with substance abuse disorders and dependence issues. I also provide services to individuals who experience work related stress, bereavement issues, poor work life balance issues, individuals who have post-traumatic stress disorder and trauma issues. I see a spectrum of behavioral and mental disorders in my office. Of my patient case load, I typically see 40% of the patients struggle with depressive disorders, 20% with anxiety disorders, 15% with trauma and stressor related problems; 10% neurodevelopmental disorders, 10% schizophrenia spectrum and bipolar related disorders, and 5% with other behavioral and mental health disorders.

In my practice the most difficulty I face with providing psychological services to my clients is to find a psychiatrist to prescribe psychopharmacological medication to my clients in a timely manner to treat their symptoms. I usually have to resort to consulting with a family physician who is not trained in psychopharmacological intervention to prescribe the medication to my clients. I am trained in psychopharmacological interventions as I have a post-doctoral Master's degree in Clinical Psychopharmacology, which makes it easier for me to consult with the family physicians to recommend the medication(s) that is needed for my clients because I am knowledgeable about what medication(s) will work best for the client(s). However, when this consultation is done, my client has to incur the additional cost to travel and pay for the office visit to get their medication(s). Often patients suffering with mental illness do not follow through as this takes motivation, persistence, and energy, which depressed, anxious, and severely mentally ill patients do not have. One solution here could be to allow appropriately trained doctoral level psychologists with a Master's Degree from an approved program in Psychopharmacology to prescribe psychotropic medications in the Territory.

Another area of difficulty for me is to assist my clients who have serious mental illnesses and co-occurring disorders with the appropriate in-patient treatment and care. As we all know, there are no residential treatment center for the chronically mentally ill and for individuals with co-occurring disorders. We must prioritize these populations and provide these services to these individuals in an expeditious manner as the state of mental health for the chronically mentally ill and the homeless is non-existent. As a licensed clinical psychologist testifying before this committee today, I am hopeful that you all hear the testimonies today and take a proactive stance to effectuate change to improve the state of mental health in this territory as a priority.

Thank you.



Dr. Denese Marshall-Richards, Psy.D., M.S.C.P., ABPP

Board Certified Psychologist

American Board of Professional Psychology

Licensed Clinical Psychologist – VI, FL, LA