

# COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, HOSPITALS & HUMAN SERVICES

## The Honorable Ray Fonseca CHAIRMAN



### 35<sup>th</sup> Legislature of the U.S. Virgin Islands

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May 17, 2023

## COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, HOSPITALS AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE REPORT

The Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services held a hearing on May 3, 2023, at the Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall on St. Thomas. The Committee received testimony and commemorated two Physicians in the community.

The meeting was called to order by the Committee Chair, Senator Ray Fonseca at 10:15 a.m.

### COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Kenneth L. Gittens  
Senator Marise C. James  
Senator Diane T. Capehart  
Senator Marvin A. Blyden  
Senator Donna A. Frett-Gregory  
Senator Milton Potter  
Senator Samuel Carrion  
Senator Francis E. Novelle, Jr.

### NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Angel L. Bolques, Jr.  
Senator Carla J. Joseph  
Senator Franklin D. Johnson

### BLOCK I

In the opening of the Committee hearing, Chairman Fonseca welcomed the audience, testifiers, and staff and gave an overview of the committee's responsibilities and day's agenda. He also gave sentiments on May being Mental Health Awareness Month and gave special tribute to two distinguished Virgin Islanders, Dr. Alfred Heath, and Dr. Marilyn Nutter (deceased).

The Committee received testimony on the operational and implementation status of the Governor Juan F. Luis Hospital & Medical Center. Chief Executive Officer, Doug Koch, placed on the record that during the month of April his team executed a successful transfer of patients, from the heavily damaged



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Governor Juan F. Luis hospital to the temporary JFL modular North facility. He said that not only will it allow continuation of quality patient care, but the transfer means that necessary work can now begin in earnest at the new replacement hospital. Koch cautioned, however, "We should not forget that this is a temporary structure and there are plenty of drawbacks and challenges that we will need to overcome in the weeks, months and years to follow."

#### **Invited Testifiers:**

Mr. Daryl A. Smalls

Executive Director of Facilities & Corporate Development Territorial Hospital Redevelopment Team

Mr. Doug Koch

Chief Executive Officer, Governor Juan F. Luis Hospital & Medical Center

Mr. Christopher Finch

Chairman, Virgin Islands Government Health, and Hospital Corporation

#### **Additional Testifiers Present:**

Ms. Hazel Philbert, BSN, RN, MBA, MSHS, CPHQ  
Chief Operations Officer

Ms. Darice Plaskett, RN, MSA, FACHE  
Chief Nursing Officer

Ms. Mavis Matthew, M.D. (Remotely)  
Chief Medical Officer

Ms. Rosalie Javois (Remotely)  
Interim Executive Vice President of Finance

Ms. B. Patricia Welcome (Remotely)  
Chief Legal Counsel

Mr. Gregory Bryant (Remotely)  
Chief Information Officer

Mr. James J. Rollins (Remotely)  
Public Information Officer

#### **LUNCH**

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Recess was called at 1:54 p.m.

#### **BLOCK II**

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The hearing is back on the record at 2:39 p.m.

The Committee received testimony on the operational and the redevelopment status of the Schneider Regional Medical Center and the Myrah Keating Smith Clinic, of St. John.



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Schneider Regional CEO, Tina Comissiong, highlighted the recent full accreditation by the Joint Commission, an independent body which evaluates hospitals nationwide. According to Comissiong, “The Joint Commission...found our facilities and operations to be in compliance with the hospital exceeding the expectations of over 250 standards for the provision of healthcare.” The accredited status will last for three years. She praised the dedication of the staff and the cooperation of other government agencies for the achievements.

In addition to rebuilding the hospital system after the devastation of both hurricanes, Schneider Regional Medical Center is facing financial hardship. Ms. Comissiong reported that while there is some progress in increasing revenues, the additional dollars are overshadowed by ongoing and increasing indebtedness. The cost of contracting nurses from abroad, needed to maintain nurse/patient ratio requirements, continues to surpass, by far, the cost of employing nurses who reside here. Ms. Comissiong cited the ongoing cost of supporting (boarders patients who no longer require hospitalization but have nowhere to go if discharged). The beds boarders have ceased to earn revenue and remain unavailable to patients’ requiring hospitalization. There are not enough available facilities in the community to accommodate them. The Committee vowed to work with the hospital to address their long-term debt. Schneider Regional reported 90 million dollars is outstanding accounts receivable on their books and 28 million in account payable. Chairman Fonseca is extremely concerned about the overall financial state of Schneider Regional Medical Center.

#### The following individuals submitted correspondence:

Dr. Jerry R. Smith, M.D.- May 2<sup>nd</sup> Letter of Absence

#### **Invited Testifiers:**

Ms. Tina M. Comissiong, Esq., MPA  
Chief Executive Officer of the Roy Schneider Regional Medical Center

Mr. Daryl A. Smalls  
Executive Director of Facilities & Corporate Development Territorial Hospital Redevelopment Team

Mr. Jerry Smith, M.D.  
District Governing Board Chairman, Schneider Regional Medical Center



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#### Additional Testifiers Present:

Ms. Delphine Olivacce  
Chief Nursing Officer

Ms. Kenisha Angol  
Director of Finance

Mr. Peter John Baptiste  
Vice President of Facilities and Engineering

Mr. Christopher Borgesen  
Vice President of Operations

Mr. Brandon Richardson  
Vice President of Information Technology

Ms. Su-Layne Walker  
Legal Counsel

In conclusion, Chairman Fonseca, along with other members of the Committee learned of the many other challenges facing the territory's hospitals, including the shortage of nurses, even with significant salary incentives recently negotiated. The need to build local confidence in the quality of care yet available, the need to diversify the, 'payor mix,' to increase revenue from private insurers and to convince the federal government that it must increase the base rate for Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements, unchanged for decades despite the rising costs of providing treatment to those insured under these programs.

Chairman Fonseca, pledged to continue to gather input from the various sectors of the Virgin Islands Healthcare Network, as members of the Legislature considers appropriating resources and proposing laws which guarantee the continuation of healthcare security and excellence for all residents and visitors.

Finally, Chairman Fonseca, thanked his colleagues, staff, and central staff and adjourned the Committee hearing at 5:26 p.m.

#### The following request for additional information was made through the chair:

Senator Donna A. Frett-Gregory:

1. Number of physicians by specialty?
2. Uncompensated care: What are your billing practices?
3. By year, a breakdown of the \$90 million outstanding balance for SRMC and the 28 million in accounts payable.

Prepared by:

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