



THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, HOSPITALS AND HUMAN SERVICES

Thursday, 2 November 2023

**SENATOR RAY FOSENCA
CHAIRMAN**

Good day Honorable Senator Ray Fonseca, Chairman of the Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services, Committee members, other Senators present, and to the listening and viewing audience. Today I am before you as the Commissioner Nominee of the Department of Human Services to provide an update on the various programs managed within the Department of Human Services. With me today I have members of our Senior Leadership team to include Assistant Commissioner Carla Benjamin, Assistant Commissioner Denelle Baptiste, Chief Financial Officer Lydia Magras, Deputy Commissioner Miguel Tricoche, Deputy Commissioner Sean Georges, and Deputy Commissioner Michael Trotman.

On October 2, 2023, Governor Albert Bryan, Jr, announced my nomination to lead this Department. I immediately started and I am still in the process of meeting with the various divisions and assessing the many programs that comprise this Department. At the conclusion of my assessment, I will meet with my Senior Leadership team to provide my findings and determine our path going forward and implement changes as required. The department is comprised of 15 Divisions with 84 programs within these Divisions. The following testimony is based on current operations as provided by my Leadership team.

THE OFFICE OF INTAKE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

The Office of Intake and Emergency Services (Intake) has the primary function, by statute, of receiving and appropriately responding to all reports of suspected child maltreatment. Some key service areas include:

- Child Protective Services Investigation
- Services for At-Risk (pre-delinquent) youth

- Emergency Welfare Services
- Child Abuse Registry services

This division's biggest challenge is staffing, especially in the St. Thomas/St. John district. Social workers are needed in the St. Thomas/St. John district and vacancy announcements have not been successful. An additional challenge is the community's misconception that VIDHS has a right and responsibility to become involved in all matters involving children. The department can and should only become involved in matters where there is legal authority to do so.

To address the recruitment and retention of social workers as well as to educate the public about the roles of VIDHS programs, the Communications teams at VIDHS has launched a series of public education projects including a podcasts on the VIDHS' YouTube channel with promotions on all VIDHS social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tik Tok and LinkedIn). Intake will be appearing on the podcast in an episode to discuss and provide facts about child protective services and another episode focused on the wide range of services provided by the Intake unit. This will be one of several activities geared towards recruitment and building staff capacity.

One of Intake's ongoing activities/responsibilities is providing training and education to community stakeholders on how the child protective services as a system should work and what other agencies' roles are in the system. Currently, the presentations are conducted upon request and often in response to situations with negative outcomes. Intake will develop and follow an annual structured schedule of presentations to community partners and stakeholders (governmental and nongovernmental) in addition to responding to requests for presentations.

The department is currently providing internship opportunities for social work students (interns) at several universities, including the University of the Virgin Islands (BSW and MSW), with hopes of activating a pipeline for new social workers that will continue work for VIDHS after obtaining their degrees and licensure.

DIVISION OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

The Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is the department's ongoing services unit. When cases of child maltreatment are investigated and maltreatment risk levels are medium or higher, they are referred to DCFS for continued services, monitoring, and risk reassessments. Some key service areas include:

- Protective Unit – This unit is the in-home services unit.
- Foster Care and Adoptions Unit – This is the out-of-home care unit.
- Resource Families recruitment, training, certification, and retention including foster and adoptive parents training (National Training and Development Curriculum for foster and Adoptive parents - NTDC).
- Home Study Preparation (private custody matters, international adoptions, ICPC home assessments, resource placement certification).

The pool of resource families (formerly termed “foster parents”) in the territory is critically low. This has increased the jurisdiction's dependence on congregate care, which is not in line with best practices and federal standards. There are few options for elevated levels of care in family home settings. The division is presently in the process of selecting a Licensing Specialist in each district whose

sole job function is recruitment, training and retention of resource parents and reinvigorating the Foster Parent Associations in each district.

Program and fiscal infrastructure for ongoing administration of federal IV-B and IB-E funds are not in place but are currently being developed. Development of these processes will allow for efficient use, tracking and generating federally required reporting on the funds.

The Children's Bureau and their contractor the Capacity Building Center for States are working collaboratively with DCFS to implement all required components of the Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018 (Family First or FFPSA).

The University of the Virgin Islands Caribbean Exploratory Research Center (UVICERC), through a Memorandum of Agreement with VIDHS is also completing a community environmental scan for the development of stakeholder engagement initiatives related to the Family First legislation and to collect, analyze, and apply community data to seize opportunities to improve child welfare outcomes.

DIVISION OF INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION SERVICES

The Division of Intervention and Prevention Services (DIPS) was formerly known as Division of Juvenile Justice. The division provides services to children and youth whose issue of outstanding conflict puts them at risk for involvement in the juvenile justice system. The services provided by this division are intended to remediate behavioral problems, assist parents with managing the activities of their adolescents and to prevent them from running afoul of the law. Some key service areas are:

- Intervention Offices – There are two (2) DIPS offices, one in each district staffed with a District Manager and workers that provide case management and service planning (procurement of counseling, therapy, evaluations, group and family therapy, etc.) for youth who remain in their homes as well as youth remanded to YRC.
- Persons In Need of Supervision (PINS)
- Youth Rehabilitation Center (YRC) represents the most restrictive, least discretionary service along the juvenile justice services continuum. It is the only secured detention facility in the territory.
- Anna's Hope Group Home – is a foster group home for youth ages 13 years old to 21 years old (if in Extended Foster Care). While this facility is a component of DIPS, Youth admitted to this residential facility are referred from Intake and DCFS for child protective services not just juvenile services challenges.

This division's biggest challenge is the inability to get parents to consistently participate in services and activities designed to positively impact their youth's lives. Parents often abdicate their responsibility for youth and children to the department. Workers are increasing efforts to educate and involve parents in their child's service plans for the start of engagement and collaborating with the courts (when applicable) to hold parents accountable for failure to follow through on involvement.

Public education activities will be conducted promoting the fact that there is a continuum of services to at-risk youth and very few clients end up at YRC. Detention at YRC is the least desirable service strategy among the services provided by DIPS.

OFFICE OF RESIDENTIAL AND INTERSTATE COMPACT AFFAIRS

The Office of Residential and Interstate Compact Affairs (ORICA or Residential) manages and monitors the services of clients in residential facilities in and outside of the Territory. The staff at ORICA work collaboratively with the assigned worker in the appropriate unit (DCFS, DIPS, etc.) that is working directly on their behalf. Residential clients include children, adults, and the elderly. Clients at residential facilities are minors that are in the temporary or permanent legal custody of VIDHS or are adults that VIDHS has custody of. The residential clients have developmental, psychological, and/or youth conduct and behavioral issues which require specialized treatment that are often not available in the Territory. All services are provided through contracts that are fully locally funded.

The cost of contracts for residential services continues to be a great challenge. The cost of care per day increases yearly by state law in some jurisdictions and as a part of the contract renewal process for others. The increases worsen the unsustainable cost of residential services. Contracts linger in the negotiation phase pending proof of funding. Unexecuted contracts require more time-consuming payment approval processes and result in late payments to providers.

OFFICE OF HEAD START

The Office of Head Start administers the Head Start Program in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Head Start promotes the school readiness of children who are three years old by December 31st and up to five years old at enrollment from low-income families. The program reserves 10% of slots for children with special needs. The program's funded enrollment for the Territory is 794.

The Head Start program is currently managing six major construction projects on all three islands that are all in varying stages of demolition and construction, including the Cruz Bay Head Start. The new head start sites will result in state-of-the-art facilities for educating our children between the ages of 3 and 5. The new sites will also provide hardened facilities that are alternate sites for use in disaster preparation and response.

Head Start Region II Conference is scheduled to be hosted by the U.S. Virgin Islands on the island of St. Thomas in 2024, from October 27- 31, 2024. This event will boost the visibility of the Head Start program and hopefully result in increased enrollment.

OFFICE OF CHILD CARE AND REGULATORY SERVICES

The Office of Child Care and Regulatory Services manages and monitors licensing of all child care facilities in the territory, ensuring safe, high quality early childhood care and education environments across the territory. Key service areas are:

- The Licensing Unit licenses/certifies and monitors all private and government-operated childcare facilities.
- The Quality Improvement Unit provides services to increase the quality of childcare through consumer education, caregiver/teacher training and provision of resources for quality improvement.
- The Subsidy Resource and Referral Unit administers the federal Child Care Development Fund Program (CCDF) that provides subsidies to parents and families for childcare. Childcare subsidy recipients may range in age from 1 day old to under 13 years old. Subsidies can be provided to individuals with disabilities up to age 19 years of age.

The territory's inability to fully expend formula federal funds amidst the availability of special funding related to the COVID pandemic continues to present a challenge as the grants approach their final obligation and liquidation periods. The same expenditures that would fulfill key formula grant earmarks, can be paid with the special funds, and create a utilization challenge.

The territory is implementing increased subsidy rates for all childcare providers that are CCDF participants. This will bring the territory in line with the federally recommended subsidy percentiles and allow the territory to expend federal childcare dollars more easily.

DIVISION OF SENIOR CITIZEN AFFAIRS

The Division of Senior Citizen Affairs (SCA) currently operates eleven (11) programs in addition to the Office of the Administrator, who are dedicated to supporting the elderly community in the US Virgin Islands (USVI). These programs include Socio-Recreation, Homemaker Services, Senior Community Services Employment Program (SCSEP), Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), Family Caregiver Support Program (FCSP), Foster Grandparent Program (FGP), State Pharmaceutical Assistance Program (SPAP), Adult Protective Services (APS), Information and Referrals (I&R), Elderly Nutrition Program (commonly known as Meals on Wheels), and Homes for the Aged.

The SCA staff works hard to address the needs of our elderly community which continues to grow and has exceeded the capacity of some of our programs. We are developing approaches and solutions to mitigate and address our waitlists for daily meal delivery and assistance with daily living. The Elderly Nutrition Program, or Meals on Wheels as it is more commonly known, has developed a plan to expand operations to service additional persons on St.

Croix and St. Thomas and will be submitting a request for additional funding to our federal partners to help support that effort.

The VIDHS Socio-Recreation Program operates 3 senior centers located throughout the territory that give individuals aged 60 and older an opportunity to socialize, interact, and experience the companionship of their peers. The objective of this program is to provide specialized recreational and experiential activities that contribute to maintaining or improving the health, functional capacities, and overall quality of life for our senior population. It is important to note that active independence is a requirement for participation and maximum benefit from the program and that adult day care is not currently a service provided within our senior centers. Memory disorders are very prevalent among our aging population with a gap in the availability of services currently within the department and our community. VIDHS is looking into opportunities for future support for memory care and adult day care services particularly as we build our new skilled nursing facilities.

VIDHS operates two (2) long-term residential care facilities for the elderly in need of 24-hour care in addition to providing nursing support services for DHS clients at the Lucinda Millin Home. In previous testimony to this body, staffing and supply shortages as well as facility concerns were key challenges identified for the homes. Since then, the Homes have:

- Made repairs to the kitchen roof to prevent leaking.
- Completed an electrical overhaul of the kitchen wiring.
- Procured enough supplies to sustain the homes through the closing of the fiscal year and subsequent ERP shutdown until funds become available once again.

The division is working with the fiscal division to ensure the homes can maintain

the inventory that is needed and to optimize the monthly allotment process for purchasing necessary supplies.

The department has made a lot of progress but there is still more to be done. The team works diligently every day to mitigate and overcome these challenges to ensure our residents receive the best care in a safe environment. These challenges, among others, contribute to the growing wait list for entry into the Homes, due to the inability to sustain and increase capacity in the current state. The waitlist for the homes continues to grow every day and includes community members as well as those individuals within our territory's hospitals known as boarders. The department continues to work with the hospitals to address boarders and is working collaboratively to craft solutions to relieve the hospitals of approximately 13 boarders across both islands. The department is plagued with limited physical and human resource capacity within our homes and limited funding to increase our off-island capacity but are exploring every avenue to address this chronic issue.

DIVISION OF FAMILY ASSISTANCE

The Division of Family Assistance (DFA) provides timely and accurate food, cash, energy, and family support assistance to Virgin Islands residents through the operation of nine units: Certification, Front End, Issuance, Claims, Fraud, Jobs Opportunity and Basic Skills Program, Personal Responsibility Education Program, Supplemental Nutrition Education Program. These nine units administer the following programs:

- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Temporary Aide to Needy Families (TANF)
- Job Opportunity and Basic Skills (JOBS) Program
- Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP)

- Aid to the Aged Blind and Disabled (AABD)
- SNAP Education (SNAP-ED)
- SNAP Employment & Training (SNAP- E&T)
- SNAP Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (SNAP- PEBT)
- Energy Crisis Assistance Program – Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)

Throughout the COVID pandemic, DFA has administered several emergency relief benefits to include several rounds of SNAP – PEBT as well as Pandemic Emergency Assistance (PEAF) Allotments.

The division is also preparing to launch the Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) to provide financial assistance to qualified individuals to purchase or pay water bills through the Water and Power Authority or registered water haulers. The public will be invited to submit applications before the end of Calendar Year 2023 and there will be an internal effort to pre-qualify individuals based on their participation in our other eligibility programs.

The division was pleased to announce that effective October 1, 2023, SNAP households received an increase in their SNAP Benefits. The Virgin Islands opted to raise the gross income limit from 130 percent to 175 percent of the Federal Poverty Income Guidelines (FPIGs) for Categorically Eligible (CATEL) SNAP households, which also increased. The increase to 175 percent only applies to the gross income evaluation and varies by household size.

MEDICAID

The Medicaid Program provides health insurance coverage to qualified residents of the US Virgin Islands through combined federal and local government funding.

Eligible covered groups under the program include low-income adults, children, pregnant women, aged adults, and people with disabilities that, through an application, meet financial and non-financial criteria, such as residency, immigration status, and citizenship.

As of October 2023, there are 28,066 enrolled members with the VI Medicaid Program and 1,357 providers enrolled with the VI Medicaid Program. Of those total providers 375 are in-territory and 982 are out of territory. This fiscal year, 132 Medicaid provider agreements have already been processed and approved within DHS.

Within the division of Medicaid, there is the Program Integrity Unit whose function is to identify fraud, waste, and abuse and collaborate with the Medicaid Fraud Control Unit (MFCU) on potential fraud cases. As of July 2023, the division onboarded a Program Integrity Director with the intention of staffing the unit with two fraud investigators, two eligibility quality control reviewers, and one program integrity analyst to enhance the department's commitment to reduce fraud.

Currently, the Department has been working on multiple initiatives to improve the quality of service for our members, while also enhancing efficiency for internal processes. The implementation of the departments eligibility and claims systems has continued to see major improvements in timely and efficient processing of member applications and provider payment. The division continues its efforts to improve operations and is currently working on several other Health Information Technology projects to include:

1. Electronic Visit Verification (EVV) - This solution enables the program to track Personal Care Attendants (PCA) and Home Health services provided by Medicaid enrolled providers. It is also a tool to prevent fraud,

waste, and abuse. This implementation is mandated by law.

2. Provider Enrollment Applications (PEA) - This implementation of this solution will enable the USVI to digitize and streamline the provider enrollment process.

A strategic plan has been developed and submitted to CMS for the use of an additional \$6.3M provided to the territory for technology implementations. The division looks forward to continued collaboration with CMS and the National Association of Medicaid Directors.

PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY UNWIND

With the end of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE) on May 11, 2023, the department has had to once again pivot in its operations and “unwind” the benefits and flexibilities that have been offered over the last three (3) years especially within its eligibility programs. “Unwinding” refers to the resumption of regular eligibility and enrollment operations. Divisions such as Medicaid and the Division of Family Assistance (DFA) which operates the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) have developed plans to adjust to the PHE unwind which includes utilizing and extending waivers to avoid abrupt disruptions to the process. Challenges that the department continues to work through includes recertification processes that have been on hold through-out the pandemic, identifying alternatives for clients who will no longer be eligible for benefits, and adjusting to reduced Federal Matching Assistance Percentage (FMAP) rates for Medicaid claims among other process-oriented considerations.

Additionally, the department has already seen a decrease in the support services and supplemental funding that’s been received during the pandemic.

In December 2023, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 (P.L. 117-328),

made permanent the 83% FMAP for the USVI. In March 2020, as part of the COVID-19 relief enacted in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFRCA), Congress provided increased Medicaid funding to states and territories through increased FMAP rates. Increased FMAP rates in turn reduce the local fund match requirement, and in this case by 6.2% in response to the PHE. To receive the increased FMAP, FFCRA requires that any individuals who were enrolled in Medicaid at the start of the PHE or became enrolled in Medicaid during the emergency period remain eligible for Medicaid through the last day of the month in which the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency ends unless the individual requests a voluntary termination of eligibility, or the individual ceases to be a resident of the state/territory.

At the end of the PHE, which occurred on May 11, 2023, states/territories must initiate all renewals, post-enrollment verifications, and redeterminations for all individuals enrolled when the continuous enrollment expires. To facilitate this, the department has sent renewal notices and requests for information to enrollees through the mail and via text/email messages. As a result of the unwind, many Medicaid members have lost coverage and became uninsured or experience gaps in coverage. To mitigate some of this impact, the division worked with the Government Employees Service Commission (GESC) Health Insurance Board to coordinate the transition of eligible individuals impacted. Additionally, the division has directed individuals to the Individual Health Insurance Program through the Lt. Governor's office to explore the feasibility of that option.

Like Medicaid, the SNAP program is also unwinding from various waivers, flexibility and additional benefits afforded during the PHE. One challenge experienced by both programs includes enrollees not receiving or paying due attention to the provided communication regarding the requirement to recertify and the timeline to do so. Another challenge includes the significant increase in workload during the unwinding process that has been difficult to keep up with

regarding conducting renewals for these large caseloads timely.

DIVISION OF DISABILITIES AND REHABILITATION

The Disabilities and Rehabilitation Services (DRS) Division is a core component of the local workforce system. The Division partners with private employers, government agencies, and community stakeholders to facilitate employment and training of persons with disabilities. Primary services offered include Pre-Employment Transition Services, Supported Employment, and Older Blind Independent Living Program.

DHS is currently under specific conditions with the Third-Party Fiduciary Agent (TPFA) pertaining to funds received for the Vocational Rehabilitation Program. DHS continues to work with the TPFA to implement the corrective action steps needed to mitigate areas of concern.

In addition to the partnership with TPFA and the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) to address non-compliance, the division has recently filled two critical vacancies, with the addition of a transitional program assistant and a vocational rehabilitation counselor in this fiscal year. Operational efficiency will also improve due to the onboarding of a case management system that will assist staff to better manage the application process, program eligibility, referral tracking, employment services, and federal reporting.

Another significant milestone for the division is the re-establishment of two councils supporting the advocacy for services that lead to equal opportunity for persons with disabilities. The councils are known as the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) and the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), and the division is actively collaborating with Governor Bryan to appoint community members to the councils in accordance with federal regulations.

DIVISION OF NON-PROFIT AND SUPPORT SERVICES

The Department of Human Services is responsible for the distribution of funding to thirty-eight (38) subgrantees for FY2024. The Division of Nonprofits and Support Services works closely with the nonprofits funded through the GVI Miscellaneous and Crisis intervention funding. For FY2024 there have been small advances in funding to support vulnerable populations:

- Youth Services Appropriations have increased 22% funding thirteen (13) youth services programs.
- Homeless Services Appropriations have increased 20% funding ten (10) homeless services programs.
- Other programs funded include services for disabled- youth and adults, substance abuse residential treatment, Domestic Violence service providers, Support for Cancer patients and transportation for the Elderly on St. John.

DHS, a member of the USVI Continuum of Care Council, will be assisting with the development and establishment of administration for USVI Continuum of Care Council. The FY2024 appropriation will support the COC in addressing homelessness in the USVI. CoC staff will prioritize implementing the HUD funded Continuum of Care program mandates, including the establishment of a Territorial Coordinated Entry System, monitoring the Homeless Management Information System and monitoring USVI COC funded homeless services programs.

DISASTER RECOVERY

DHS has diligently collaborated with the Office of Disaster Recovery to seek and

maximize its funding through the FEMA Public Assistance (PA) and Hazard Mitigation Grant (HMGP) programs to enhance our disaster recovery efforts. We have been obligated \$71,041,673 for FEMA PA projects and \$3,651,784.94 for HMGP projects. The department also anticipates an additional \$260,448,837 to be obligated for FEMA PA.

As discussed in previous committee hearings, many of our facilities are outdated and have been through several major storms which have impacted the infrastructure of the buildings. The continued cost of maintenance and repairs has taken its toll and is no longer a cost-effective approach. The team is pleased that through a concerted effort and appeals of original FEMA projections, DHS now has major full prudent replacements approvals pending for our DHS St. Thomas Knud Hansen Complex at an approximate cost of \$128M and Herbert Grigg Home for the Aged in the approximate amount of \$131M. Queen Louise Home for the Aged full-prudent replacement has already been obligated for \$66.8M, as well as much needed permanent repairs to our Cruz Bay St. John Multipurpose Center in the amount of \$2.3M.

Additionally, our Head Start Program secured federal disaster recovery grants funding from the Office of Head Start and is proceeding with six (6) major construction projects across the Territory. Projects are well underway in various stages of development.

To facilitate many of the department's current facility concerns and in anticipation of building renovations, there are several staff relocations underway. Major relocations include the transition of staff and residents from the Queen Louise Home for the Aged for temporary repairs and relocation of staff from the St. John Multipurpose Center, the Knud Hansen Complex, and the Commissioner's Office in St. Croix.

OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

The Office of Communications is responsible for coordinating a comprehensive effort to inform the public of the Department's goals, messages, plans, and activities through various media outlets.

The team also oversees and coordinates the writing, publication, and production of all communication products, press releases, printed materials, photos/videos, website, and social media postings generated from DHS.

In 2023, DHS Communications has issued over 80 press releases, providing coverage on several campaigns including USVI Summer PEBT 2023 issuance, OCCRS Non-Traditional Hours for Childcare, Medicaid and SNAP Recertification reminders, Application Period announcements on Grant funding opportunities, and various other reminders and notifications for the public.

The team this year has also moved the bulk of its audio and video production operations in-house and has begun producing original audio and video content centered around the Department's vital programs.

Be on the lookout for DHS Division of Medicaid's brand new "Update my Contact" Commercial, currently being circulated on Local network television and web streaming as well as our brand new "Your VIDHS Podcast, now streaming on YouTube, Apple Music and Buzzsprout.com

These DHS podcast episodes will help spread educational and substantive information to the community at large, giving them a better understanding of how to maneuver through the various services being offered by the Department. The first episode is slated for early November.

HUMAN RESOURCES

The Virgin Islands Department of Human Services has six hundred eighty-two dedicated professionals' territory wide. The breakdown is as follows: there are three hundred seventy-one (371) professionals in the island St. Croix district; three hundred eleven (311) professionals in the St. Thomas/St. John district. These hardworking individuals cover fifteen divisions and eighty-four programs.

At the end of Fiscal Year 23 the department hired approximately sixty (60) employees. However, during that same period we lost thirty-three (33) employees for various attrition reasons. The department thus far for the Fiscal Year 2024 has hired fourteen (14) employees. Most employees have received their negotiated salary increases along with retroactive payments. There are less than two (2) percent awaiting their increases, which are currently going through the approval process outside the department.

The department's workforce is covered by six (6) unions. These unions are as follows: Law Enforcement Supervisors Union (LESU), Seafarers International Union (SIU) Corrections Officers, Seafarers International Union (SIU) Master, United Steelworkers Masters, and Supervisors (USWM/USW), and Virgin Islands Workers Union (VIWU). There are currently three expired agreements awaiting negotiation through the Office of Collective Bargaining. Those agreements cover the Law Enforcement Supervisors Union (LESU), United Steelworkers Supervisors union (USW), and Virgin Islands Workers union (VIWU). The Seafarers International Union master agreement has been granted a day-to-day extension, as their agreement recently expired.

The department continues to actively recruit to fill much needed roles left vacant through different forms of attrition. The salary structure has historically

been on the lower end of the scale. Having the union contracts negotiated and ratified will aid the department with its recruitment and retention activities.

The HR and Fiscal team are actively working to update and validate the department's personnel listing and conduct analysis to prioritize our FY24 vacancies.

Closing Statement

In closing, the Department of Human Services works diligently every day to conduct its mission with the resources that are available. I would like to publicly thank our staff for their unwavering dedication and continued commitment as well as Governor Bryan and Lt. Governor Roach for their continued support of the department. As I take on this challenge, I ask for your continued support and patience as the DHS team work collectively for the needed improvements benefiting the clients we serve in this community. This concludes our presentation and the DHS team, and I remain available to answer any questions you may have regarding our testimony today.