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TESTIMONY TO THE 35TH LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS
COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, HOSPITALS, AND HUMAN SERVICES
Wednesday, December 6, 2023

Good afternoon, Honorable Senator Ray Fonseca, Chairman of the Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services, other Senators present, and the listening and viewing audience. I am Attorney Tina M. Comissiong, MPA, Chief Executive Officer of Schneider Regional Medical Center (SRMC). I would like to thank this Committee for the opportunity to provide testimony on Bill No. 35-0173, sponsored by Senator Angel Bolques, amending Title 5 of the Virgin Islands Code to add a chapter which provides a mechanism for newborn infants to be relinquished to a safe environment and for the parents of the newborn infant to anonymously relinquish the newborn infant without risk of civil or criminal liability.

We are in support of the proposed legislation. SRMC agrees that abandonment can cause injury and death to newborn infants. We further agree to be a part of the process that allows for a newborn infant to be relinquished safely. We agree to accept newborns directly from the parent or through one of the avenues proposed by this bill, to include the Fire Department, Emergency Medical Services (EMS), and/or the Police Department. The Roy L. Schneider Hospital is an emergency medical facility providing great care to the community 24/7 and we are equipped to examine and perform tests on the newborn infants to determine if the relinquished infant has been abused and/or neglected.

While the Hospital agrees to maintain the infant until all testing and examination is complete, we suggest that the Department of Human Services (DHS) be obligated by legislation to come to the Hospital to pick up the infant within six hours of a discharge. Additionally, we suggest that this

legislation specifies that DHS is granted temporary guardianship status over the newborn infant while the petition for official guardianship is in process and awaiting the final court order. This will allow DHS to be the legal decision maker during the interim period. Lastly, should the Hospital determine that an infant must be transferred off island to receive additional medical care, we ask that this legislation include language that suggests DHS shall be responsible for paying for the off island medical care as well as arranging and paying for the transfer off island and the return of the infant to the island. We also suggest language that states DHS shall assign an adult representative to accompany the infant off island if required.

SRMC is dedicated to supporting the community by ensuring access to the best care possible for all our members. We continue to welcome opportunities to collaborate with other stakeholders to create a safer and healthier community. We have a great team of professionals working tirelessly in our Emergency Room and I'd like to take this opportunity to thank them for all that they do for our community.

Thank you again for allowing me to offer support towards this legislation. This concludes my testimony. I will remain available for any questions that you may have.