



**TESTIMONY TO THE COMMITTEE ON
HEALTH, HOSPITALS, AND HUMAN SERVICES
BY DOUGLAS KOCH, FACHE (CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER)
OF THE GOVERNOR JUAN F. LUIS HOSPITAL AND MEDICAL CENTER
AN ACT AMENDING TITLE 5 VIRGIN ISLANDS CODE, CHAPTER 201,
BY ADDING A SUBCHAPTER V
ENACTING THE SAFE HAVEN NEWBORN PROTECTION ACT
DECEMBER 01, 2023**

Good day, Honorable Senator Ray Fonseca, Chairman of the Committee on Health, Hospitals, and Human Services, Senators of the 35th Legislature of the U.S. Virgin Islands present, and the listening and viewing audience. I am Dr. Mavis Matthew, Interim Chief Medical Officer of the Governor Juan F. Luis Hospital and Medical Center (JFL) providing testimony on behalf of Douglas Koch, Chief Executive Officer of the Juan F. Luis Hospital. It is a privilege to provide feedback on an act amending Title 5 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 201, by adding a subchapter v enacting the Safe Haven Newborn Protection Act to provide a mechanism for a newborn infant to be relinquished to a safe environment, for the parents of the newborn infant to remain anonymous if they choose and avoid civil or criminal liability for the act of relinquishing the newborn infant.

As the only acute care hospital on the island of St Croix and one of many collaborating healthcare institutions in the Virgin Islands, we believe that this legislation holds significant promise for the well-being and safety of infants, mothers, and families in our community.

Firstly, it is crucial to acknowledge that similar laws have been successfully implemented in several other states across the United States. States such as California, Texas, Florida, Illinois, and New York have enacted Safe Haven laws and have witnessed positive impacts on infant safety and the prevention of tragic situations. These laws have proven to be a valuable



resource for mothers in crisis, ensuring that newborns are safely relinquished to responsible authorities, thus preventing the abandonment of infants in unsafe environments.

The Safe Haven Newborn Protection Act serves as a compassionate and pragmatic response to the complex and sensitive issue of infant abandonment. The primary objective of this bill is to protect the well-being and ultimately save the lives of newborns by offering a legal and secure alternative. This legislation offers a lifeline for vulnerable infants and their families by providing a safe and anonymous option for mothers who are unable or unwilling to care for their newborns.

Moreover, the positive impacts of similar legislation in other states cannot be overstated. These laws have led to a substantial reduction in infant abandonment cases, preventing tragic outcomes and ensuring that infants receive the care and support they need. By creating a pathway for mothers to surrender newborns legally and safely within designated locations, such as hospitals and fire stations, the Safe Haven Newborn Protection Act provides an opportunity for these infants to be placed in the appropriate care system promptly.

The benefits of enacting the Safe Haven Newborn Protection Act in the Virgin Islands are numerous. By implementing this legislation, we can anticipate the following positive effects:

1. **Protection of Infant Lives:** The bill will drastically reduce instances of infant abandonment, protecting the lives of newborns who may otherwise be left in unsafe conditions.
2. **Increased Awareness:** The enactment of this law will raise public awareness about the existence of safe options for mothers in crisis, encouraging them to make responsible choices for themselves and their infants.
3. **Enhanced Community Support:** The Safe Haven Newborn Protection Act will foster a supportive environment where mothers can seek help without fear of legal



- repercussions, ensuring that they receive the necessary support and resources to make informed decisions.
4. Collaboration with Relevant Agencies: This legislation will facilitate collaboration between healthcare providers, social service agencies, law enforcement, and community organizations to ensure the safe and appropriate care of surrendered infants.

In conclusion, Gov. Juan F. Luis Hospital and Medical Center stands firmly behind the proposed legislative bill, the Safe Haven Newborn Protection Act (Bill Number 35-0173). By drawing inspiration from successful laws in other states, this legislation has the potential to safeguard the lives of vulnerable infants, provide support to mothers in crisis, and build a stronger and more compassionate community in the Virgin Islands. We urge you to consider the significant positive impacts that this bill can bring and to support its passage for the betterment of our society.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.