



**35<sup>TH</sup> LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS  
COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, HOSPITALS AND HUMAN SERVICES**

**The Honorable  
Ray Fonseca  
Chair of Committee**

**THE VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**

**Testimony**

Commissioner Justa “Tita” Encarnacion, RN, MBA/HCM

An Act amending title 17 Virgin Islands Code, Chapter 10, Section 111 (a) requiring the Commissioner of Education to hire a School Health Technician for every public school in the Territory

1 Good day, Honorable Senator Ray Fonseca, Chairperson of the Committee on Health, Hospitals  
2 and Human Services; The Honorable Kenneth L. Gittens Vice Chair, Committee Members, and  
3 all Non-committee members, and the viewing and listening audience. I am Justa Encarnacion,  
4 Commissioner for the Virgin Islands Department of Health. I have with me today Dr. Nicole  
5 Craigwell-Syms, Assistant Commissioner.

6 I am providing testimony on the Act amending Title 17 Virgin Islands Code, Chapter 10, Section  
7 111 (a) requiring the Commissioner of Education to hire a School Health Technician for every  
8 public school in the Territory.

9 Having a certified school health technician, in every public school will provide support to the clinical  
10 aspect of care of students in the absence of a Registered Nurse, and will have a direct impact on the well-  
11 being and safety of students. School health technicians fulfill a vital role by promptly addressing minor  
12 injuries and illnesses that may arise during school hours, thereby mitigating the necessity for students to be  
13 transported off-campus for emergency care or sent home. The advantages of this practice are extensive.

14 Numerous students contend with chronic health conditions, such as asthma, diabetes, allergies, or epilepsy.  
15 Certified school health technicians are invaluable in their ability to monitor and effectively manage these  
16 conditions, including the administration of essential medications and the swift response to emergencies.  
17 Moreover, the preventive aspect of their role is pivotal. Certified school health technicians are adept at  
18 recognizing and responding to contagious diseases. Their presence on-site enables them to proactively  
19 contain the spread of illnesses within the school environment, encompassing the isolation of unwell students  
20 and the dissemination of guidance on hygiene and infection control.

1 In addition to addressing physical health, school health technicians may also play a pivotal role in  
2 supporting students' behavioral, mental, and emotional well-being. They possess the training and skill set  
3 to identify signs and symptoms related to these domains and can provide appropriate counseling or referrals,  
4 all while fostering a secure and nurturing environment for students.

5 A noteworthy facet of their contribution pertains to health education. With certified school health  
6 technicians on hand, students gain access to firsthand health education through innovative programs and  
7 workshops conducted directly within the school premises. These educational initiatives encompass a broad  
8 spectrum of topics, including but not limited to nutrition, physical fitness, personal hygiene, and sexual  
9 health. Their presence significantly contributes to improved academic outcomes and overall student  
10 attainment.

11 The Commissioner of Education, under this Act, role is to develop a job description and standard operating  
12 procedures (to include telehealth options) for the school nurse supervisors and school health technicians.

13 The Commissioner of Health shall review and approve said job descriptions and standard operating  
14 procedures. While the specific title of Certified School Health Technician is not listed in the Bureau of  
15 Labor Statistics database, several school districts on the mainland do hire School Health Technicians. The  
16 expansion of the education and health workforce with the addition of Certified School Health Technicians  
17 supporting the health needs of the school-age population in the territory aligns with the overall goal of  
18 improving health outcomes for the adolescent population. I have stressed throughout my testimony a certain  
19 level of training, continuing education hours and certification is critical the success of such an initiative.  
20 The VIDOH supports the legislation and emphasizes that the school nurse supervisor in both districts must  
21 be a licensed registered nurses or physician assistants empowered to hire and directly supervise school  
22 health technicians who shall work under the license of the school nurse supervisor.

Virgin Islands Department of Health  
Testimony on School Health Technician for every Public School

1 In conclusion, the Department of Health is committed to reducing health risks, increasing access  
2 to quality healthcare, and enforcing health standards. The Department commits to continued  
3 collaborative efforts with the members of the 35th Legislature and we thank you for the support  
4 you give in our efforts to improve healthcare in our community. I stand ready to respond to  
5 questions.