

## **Virgin Islands Fire and Emergency Medical Services**

**Testimony on Bill No. 35-0224,  
*an Act amending Title 19, part V, chapter 45, subchapter VI to  
increase access to behavioral health services, focusing on a  
Psychiatric Emergency Response Team to provide mobile crisis  
intervention services and the 9-8-8 telecommunication system.*  
Sponsored by Senator Diane T. Capehart**



**Committee on Health, Hospitals & Human Services  
Honorable Senator Ray Fonseca, Chairman**

**Presented By:  
Lisle A. Evelyn, Jr. MA, NRP  
Assistant Director of Emergency Medical Services (EMS)**

1 Good day, Honorable Senator Ray Fonseca, Committee on Health,  
2 Hospitals and Human Services Chair, all other members, and the  
3 listening and viewing audience.

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5 I am Lisle Evelyn, Jr., the Assistant Director of Emergency Medical  
6 Services (EMS) for the Virgin Islands Fire and Emergency Medical  
7 Services (VIFEMS).

8 I am here to provide testimony on behalf of VIFEMS regarding Bill  
9 No. 35-0224, sponsored by Senator Diane T. Capehart. As the  
10 Assistant Director of EMS, I would like to express our support for this  
11 critical legislation and highlight its potential positive impact on our  
12 community.

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14 Firstly, the proposed amendment to Title 19, part V, chapter 45,  
15 subchapter VI, with a focus on increasing access to behavioral health  
16 services, is a crucial step in addressing the mental health needs of  
17 our residents. Mental health emergencies are on the rise, and having  
18 a comprehensive plan to provide timely and effective intervention is  
19 paramount. Establishing a Psychiatric Emergency Response Team  
20 (PERT) is a commendable initiative that aligns with best practices in  
21 emergency medical services. Having a specialized team trained to  
22 handle psychiatric crises will ensure a more empathetic and  
23 informed response to individuals experiencing mental health crises.

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25 Moreover, including the 9-8-8 telecommunication system  
26 significantly enhances the accessibility of emergency services for  
27 individuals in behavioral health crises. The 9-8-8 system streamlines  
28 the process for individuals to seek help during a mental health  
29 emergency, providing a dedicated and easily memorable number for  
30 those in need. This approach aligns with national efforts to  
31 standardize and improve mental health crisis services access.

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33 In our line of work at the Virgin Islands Fire and Emergency Medical  
34 Services, we often encounter situations where individuals need  
35 immediate behavioral health support. The proposed amendments in  
36 Bill No. 35-0224 will undoubtedly enhance our ability to respond  
37 effectively to such incidents, ensuring that those experiencing  
38 mental health crises receive the appropriate care promptly.

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40 Additionally, the legislation demonstrates a proactive approach to  
41 addressing the mental health challenges faced by our community,  
42 promoting overall public safety and well-being. Investing in  
43 behavioral health services and crisis intervention teams contributes  
44 to a safer and healthier community for all residents.

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46 In conclusion, we strongly endorse Bill No. 35-0224 and appreciate  
47 Senator Diane T. Capehart's commitment to improving behavioral  
48 health services in our jurisdiction. The proposed amendments align  
49 with our mission to provide the highest standard of emergency  
50 medical services to the residents of the Virgin Islands. We look  
51 forward to the positive impact this legislation will have on the well-  
52 being of our community.

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54 This concludes my testimony, and I welcome your questions.