



THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, HOSPITALS AND HUMAN SERVICES

Monday, 24 July 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. I am Denelle Baptiste, Assistant Commissioner of the Virgin Islands Department of Human Services (DHS) here on behalf of Commissioner Kimberley Causey-Gomez as she attends the Governor's Cabinet meeting. Joining me today is Alvin Milligan, Acting Administrator of the Division of Senior Citizen Affairs (SCA), and Ana Velez-Martinez, Director of Residential Services for the Herbert Grigg Home for the Aged. We appear before you today pursuant to your invitation to provide testimony on the status of the Herbert Grigg Home for the Aged.

Overview of Senior Services and Homes for the Aged

The Division of Senior Citizen Affairs (SCA) currently oversees eleven (11) programs dedicated to supporting the elderly community in the US Virgin Islands (USVI). This includes two Homes for the Aged, our 24-hour senior residential facilities. The Homes for the Aged provides quality residential health care to senior citizens, age sixty (60) and over, in a caring setting, respecting the individual's right to independence, dignity, and choice. Services include medical, nursing, and custodial care, as well as therapeutic recreational activities designed to help residents remain active and self-sufficient.

At the Herbert Grigg Home for the Aged (HGH) there are currently twenty-two (22)

residents in our care with a waiting list of twenty-three (23) individuals. We are happy to share that with the addition of new staff members we will be admitting three (3) additional residents by the first week of August 2023. One of these individuals comes from a population commonly referred to as “boarders” from the Governor Juan F. Luis Hospital. “Boarders” in this instance refers to individuals who were accepted into our territories hospitals who are now unable to be safely discharged as they would not be able to care for themselves otherwise. While seniors are not the only makeup of this population, they represent a large percentage and are indicative of the widely recognized need for sufficient long-term residential care for our growing population of seniors. A need that remains at the forefront for the staff and leadership at DHS and which guides the current work we do, and the plans that we are developing and putting into action.

Services and Staffing

- With a total of forty-eight (48) employees comprehensively, there are five (5) primary units that operate effectively in carrying out the daily functions of the homes. They include the following:
- **Dietary (9 staff members)** – This unit includes the kitchens' operations and ensures that our residents are provided with daily meals and snacks that are high quality and meet the nutritional needs of our residents set forth by the nutritionist. Staff in this unit includes Kitchen Manager (1), Cooks (3), and Food Service Workers (5).

- **Nursing/Medical (27 staff members)** – The nursing and medical staff at HGH help with daily living activities, monitoring vital signs, medication administration, and medical assessments and treatment among many other tasks and duties. Staff in this unit includes Registered Nurse (RN) (1), Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) (8), Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs) (16), and Nursing Assistants (2). The department onboarded three (3) new CNAs in the last week and will onboard 1 additional CNA by the end of August. In addition to our capable nursing staff, two (2) physicians provide contractual on-site medical services to the residents. We currently have 1 vacant RN position and 2 vacant LPN positions.
- **Institutional Support (9 staff members)** – This unit is responsible for all the support services needed to maintain clean, quality, and safe environments and experiences for the residents. Staff in this unit includes Institutional Supervisor (1), Institutional Attendants (4), and Laundry Workers (4). Other roles in this unit include Senior Aide Chauffeurs and Maintenance Workers of which there are none on staff currently. We have 1 vacancy for an Institutional Attendant.
- **Social Services** – Our social workers and social service aides work alongside our medical staff to care for our residents holistically focusing strongly on their social and emotional welfare. HGH does not currently have any Social Workers or Social Service Aides onboard but works very closely with the Adult Protective Services

unit where possible, and especially during the onboarding process, to ensure the residents' total well-being is regarded and cared for.

- **Administrative (3 staff members)**– This unit is responsible for the overall operations of the facility, especially all administrative functions. Staff in this unit includes a Director (1), Administrative Assistant (1), and Office Manager (1).
- SCSEP - In addition to our regular staff members, we also have 1 Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) worker that aids the Home.

DHS is not unique in its challenges regarding difficulties to attract, hire and retain quality talent in general but more specifically in the healthcare profession. Currently the department is confronted with recruiting and retaining nursing staff, in addition to other roles due to the relatively low salaries of those unionized positions, especially when compared to recently increased salaries at the territories' hospitals. This is an identified gap that the department is working closely with Governor Albert Bryan, Jr., and his team to address. In caring for our employees, the leadership at HGH works hard to motivate and increase the morale of staff through staff engagement activities and ensuring that their concerns are heard during regular staff check-ins. Furthermore, the department is working to address any identified staff concerns to the best of our ability.

Facilities

HGH operates out of three (3) primary buildings within a large compound owned by the Department of Human Services on the island of St. Croix. These facilities are very dated and combined with the damage experienced during Hurricane Maria in 2017, has provided difficulty in maintaining the facility. Currently there are needed repairs to the facilities to include:

- Roof repairs in kitchen, storage, and common area spaces to prevent leaks caused by heavy rain.
- Plumbing and electrical work to ensure that all areas and equipment within the facility are operating efficiently.
- Repairs to window screens which were damaged severely after the storms, and which have more recently created additional physical plant challenges; and
- Repairs to and replacement of air conditioning units throughout the facility.

In addition, to support the operations and maintenance of the facilities and grounds, the department is also in need of a new generator for the Home's kitchen to effectively carry out operations during power outages and a zero-turn lawn mower to maintain the expansive grounds of the facility.

The department is in the process of prioritizing these repairs and needs and is

gathering quotes from various vendors for the services needed.

Disaster Recovery

DHS is excited for the anticipated obligation of approximately \$129.6M for the permanent replacement of HGH, which will expand the current census capacity. The team is actively working to move these projects forward in conjunction with the Office of Disaster Recovery and to accelerate our ability to establish new facilities that will increase our capacity and remove the ongoing facility challenges that are, among other things, time-consuming. FEMA's approval of this project allows for the establishment of a new facility that caters to skilled nursing needs and incorporates state-of-the-art physical and occupational therapy for our senior population.

Additional Challenges

As previously mentioned, the department recognizes that there is a growing need for long-term 24-hour care for our seniors; a need that currently surpasses the capacity and resources of the department. Even with some extra physical spaces available for additional residents at HGH, there are several resources that would be needed to care for an increased census. Additional needs and considerations include:

- **Sufficient staff in all five (5) units to meet the required staff/resident ratios.**
- **Food, Kitchen Equipment, and Kitchen Supplies**

- **Cleaning Supplies**
- **Laundry Equipment and Supplies**
- **Vehicles, Drivers, and Maintenance of Vehicles**
- **Medication (Prescription and Over-the-Counter Medication)**
- **Medical Equipment and Supplies** (Beds, Wheelchairs, Walkers, diagnostic and evaluation tools, Disposable Undergarments, Blood Pressure Testing Kits, Glucose Testing Kits, Bandages, Bed Chucks and Pads, Masks, Disposable Gloves, etc.)
- **Medical Waste and Other Solid Waste Disposal Services**
- **Maintenance Supplies**

Given that HGH is not certified by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), which would make it eligible for Medicaid funding nor does it qualify for any other federal funding received by the department, it is 100% funded by the Government of the Virgin Islands through the General Fund. As a result, the department is only able to provide finite services based on the resources available. With a full prudent replacement on the horizon, DHS will be able to seek CMS certification for both Homes and be reimbursed by the Medicaid program for eligible Medicaid residents. This will be a major step in providing adequate resources to continuously maintaining the new facility and any pertinent equipment.

Closing Statement

In closing, the Department of Human Services works diligently every day to carry

out its mission with the resources that are available. The hardworking staff at Herbert Grigg Home for the Aged work tirelessly to provide the highest level of care for our residents that reflects the level of care they would give their own family members. 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. We would also like to thank our gracious community partners such as the St. Croix Lion's Club, the Rotary Clubs of St. Croix, the Friendenthal Moravian Church and the VI Department of Education through their USDA Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) for their generous donations of money, supplies, and food throughout the years. This concludes our presentation and the DHS team, and I remain available to answer any questions you may have regarding our testimony today.