



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

**RAY FONSECA
Chair of Committee**

THE VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

**Justa. E. Encarnacion
Commissioner**

Testimony

Bill No. 35-0119- An Act amending

Title 19 Virgin Islands code by adding chapter 7a directing the Department of Health to
develop and approve Mobile integrated healthcare programs.

1 Good day, Honorable Senator Ray Fonseca, Chair of the Committee on Health, Hospitals and
2 Human Services, Senator Kenneth L. Gittens Vice Chair, Committee Members, and all Non-
3 committee members, and the viewing and listening audience near and far. I am Justa “Tita”
4 Encarnacion, your Department of Health Commissioner for the Virgin Islands of the United
5 States. I have with me today, Dr. Nicole Craigwell-Syms, Assistant Commissioner; Hadiyah
6 Charles, Deputy Commissioner over Regulatory, both appearing from St. Thomas; and
7 Jacqueline Greenidge- Payne, Acting Director State EMS Regulatory Office here with me today.
8 Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Bill No. 35-0119- An Act amending Title
9 19 Virgin Islands code by adding chapter 7a directing the Department of Health to develop and
10 approve Mobile Integrated Healthcare programs, sponsored by Senator Marise C. James Esq.

11

12 The rising demand for emergency medical services due to an aging population and a declining
13 workforce in the Emergency Medical Services sector has created a significant challenge for many
14 communities in fulfilling the healthcare needs of our most vulnerable population, especially the
15 elderly.

16 **The Mobile Integrated Healthcare Program** - Community Paramedicine component (MIH-CP)
17 **was developed to identify chronically ill community members upon their hospital discharge**
18 **and intervene** effectively. The primary aim is to mitigate the necessity for subsequent 911
19 interventions and reduce the burden on local hospital networks. This program represents an
20 innovative approach to pre-hospital care. As part of the program, specially trained Paramedics and
21 Nurses respond to patients referred by third parties and deliver treatment within their homes.

1 Treatment plans align with the patient's plan of care, which may address a range of chronic
2 conditions, including diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary lung disease, congestive heart
3 failure, and the care of comorbidities developed from those conditions for example, pressure
4 ulcers, among others.

5 The 2017 Atlantic hurricane season stands as one of the most severe in recorded history, causing
6 catastrophic damage to the Territory. During this period, the medical team from the Department
7 of Health EMS, in collaboration with our Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC)
8 partner, Pafford, was deployed to accompany the Red Cross on their mission to distribute cleaning
9 supplies throughout the island of St. Croix. During this mission, a distressing situation emerged,
10 with numerous elderly patients found without caretakers or abandoned by their families. This sad
11 reality inspired the creation of the program in the Virgin Islands. Drawing inspiration from the
12 successful implementation of MIH-CP in rural mainland communities, we recognized the potential
13 benefits this program could bring to our community.

14 Pafford Medical, our partner in the 2017 St. Croix EMAC agreement, expressed their willingness
15 to support us further. In response, the VIDOH EMS Division presented its program, and Pafford
16 Medical mobilized five teams comprising certified wound care nurses, nurse practitioners, and a
17 medical doctor. Together, we ventured into housing communities, offering essential healthcare
18 services.

19
20 Additionally, nurses from the Department of Health Primary Care and Mental Health divisions
21 joined us in delivering care to those in need. Dr. Gregory Moorman from Moorman Aesthetic

1 Center generously offered his expertise, providing free wound debridement and consultations on
2 wound care.

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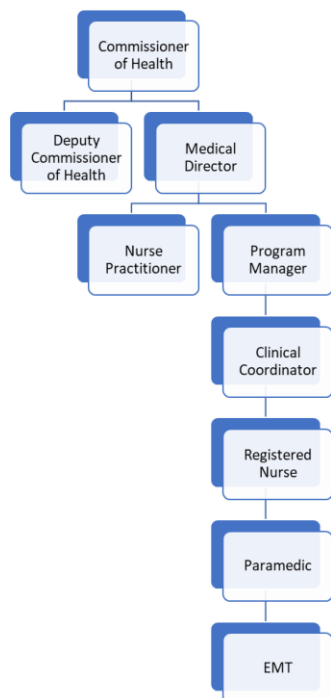
4 The remarkable support extended beyond our immediate team. Community and church
5 organizations, including Reverend Gary Moore, his wife, and members of St. Croix Christian
6 Church, as well as Carol Jeffers, a former Paramedic with the DOH rallied other first responders
7 and church communities on the mainland. Their collective effort exemplified the spirit of unity
8 and compassion, contributing significantly to the recovery of our islands.

9

10 Mobile Integrated Healthcare-Community Paramedicine started as a pilot project in St. Croix with
11 the intent to expand services to the St. Thomas/St. John district. However, due to funding
12 challenges and the inability to hire the required staff to fulfill the mandates, we were unable to
13 fully implement the program. In its inception, the program was operated through funding from the
14 EMS budget, FEMA assistance with durable goods, and other support from Pafford and the private
15 sector. With the support of the dedicated staff and limited funding, we continue to serve a number
16 of patients, in the St. Croix district, and have been successful in reducing repeated hospitalizations,
17 ER visits and most importantly 911 calls while improving the quality of life for our residents. We
18 have utilized the help of nurses from other programs to make some of these visits; however, this
19 is not sustainable without dedicated personnel and a funding source. To be successful, employees
20 and supplies are needed to do the work.

Department of Health - Mobile Integrated Healthcare (Community Paramedicine) MIH CP							
Proposed FY 2024 MIH Budget							
St. Croix District							
Position ID*	Position Name*	FTE*	Funds	Activity	Employee ID	Incumbent Name	SALARIES TOTAL
	PROGRAM MANAGER	1				Vacant	\$ 80,000.00
	NURSE PRACTITIONER - PART-TIME	1				Vacant	\$ 52,500.00
	LICENSED PRACTICAL NURSE	1				Vacant	\$ 64,000.00
	REGISTERED NURSE	1				Vacant	\$ 70,000.00
	EMERGENCY MEDICAL TECHNICIAN PARAMEDIC	1				Vacant	\$ 53,438.20
	EMERGENCY MEDICAL TECHNICIAN BASIC	1				Vacant	\$ 47,054.55
	<i>Total STX Personnel Request</i>						\$ 366,992.75
St. Thomas/St. John District							
Position ID*	Position Name*	FTE*	Funds	Activity	Employee ID	Incumbent Name	SALARIES TOTAL
	CLINICAL COORDINATOR	1				Vacant	\$ -
	NURSE PRACTITIONER - PART-TIME	1				Vacant	\$ 52,500.00
	LICENSED PRACTICAL NURSE	1				Vacant	\$ 64,000.00
	REGISTERED NURSE	2				Vacant	\$ 170,000.00
	EMERGENCY MEDICAL TECHNICIAN PARAMEDIC	1				Vacant	\$ 53,438.20
	EMERGENCY MEDICAL TECHNICIAN BASIC	1				Vacant	\$ 47,054.55
	<i>Total STTJ Personnel Request</i>						\$ 386,992.75
	Both Districts Per Annum						
	Supplies/Equipment						\$ 250,000.00
	Transportation						\$ 250,000.00
	TOTAL PERSONNEL REQUEST						\$ 753,985.50
	TOTAL BUDGET REQUEST						\$ 1,253,985.50

The Table of Organization



1 Based on the 2020 Census, the US Virgin Islands population was 87,146 of which 21.3% represent
2 residents over the age of 65, while 19.6% represent residents 17 years and below. Further,
3 approximately 29% of the U.S. Virgin Islands is uninsured and approximately 22% is below the
4 federal poverty line. Repeated hospital and emergency room visits for indigent care are economic
5 and social problems that plague our government.

6 To date, we have enrolled 1,892 patients in the program. Currently, we see and care for 89 patients
7 weekly, of which 6 are court-appointed through the Superior Court and Department of Human
8 Services Adult Protection Services. We have 16 pending referrals. With Pafford Medical providing
9 staff and their uncertain future as a provider for healthcare provision and staffing, the Virgin
10 Islands would be left without this needed service on St. Croix and would not be able to expand
11 services to St. Thomas/St. John district.

12 I would like to thank the Department of Health Team and other public and private stakeholders
13 who have supported this program over the years. Special thanks to the current members of the
14 MIH-CP. On behalf of the Department of Health, I want to thank you and the rest of the Committee
15 on Health, Hospitals and Human Services for revisiting this legislation, and we look forward to
16 your favorable support. We are ready to respond to any questions. Again, thank you for giving us
17 the opportunity to address the Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services on this
18 important legislation.