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**TESTIMONY TO THE 35TH LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS**  
**COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, HOSPITALS & HUMAN SERVICES**  
**Wednesday, October 2, 2024**

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Good morning, Honorable Senator Ray Fonseca, Chairman of the Committee on Health, Hospitals & Human Services, other Senators present, and the listening and viewing audience. For the record, I am Attorney Tina M. Comissiong, MPA, Chief Executive Officer of Schneider Regional Medical Center (SRMC). I want to thank this Committee for the opportunity to give testimony in support of the VI Diabetes Center of Excellence (VIDCOE).

I am here today on behalf of SRMC to express support for the VIDCOE and their initiatives. SRMC is dedicated to improving the health and well-being of our community, and we recognize the critical role that other healthcare providers, including the VIDCOE, play in raising diabetes awareness and providing essential support to patients and their families who are diagnosed with diabetes and prediabetes.

As we all know, the Virgin Islands has an aging population with a high prevalence of diabetes and prediabetes. The VIDCOE can help to expand access to diabetes education and offer screening and preventative treatment which will help to reduce the incidence of diabetes in the Territory. The VIDCOE can also help to improve outcomes for patients living with diabetes by creating additional access to primary and specialty care providers who are trained in treating and managing diabetes.

SRMC, and the community, will benefit if the VIDCOE is able to expand its programming. If there is better management of diabetes and chronic conditions in the community setting, there will be fewer emergency room visits, fewer inpatient admissions, and decreased numbers of patients ending up on dialysis. When diabetes is uncontrolled or untreated,

persistently high blood sugar levels can damage nerves, blood vessels, and vital organs. Very serious health conditions such as blindness, heart disease, eye/foot/skin/mouth conditions, hearing problems, and kidney failure can occur if proper diagnosis and treatment is not available to patients. If good healthcare services are available in our community from entities like the VIDCOE it will reduce the number of patients who arrive very sick at the SRMC Emergency Department and will help to avoid more costly admissions to SRMC and longer lengths of stays at SRMC.

Prediabetes can lead to diabetes unless steps are taken to prevent it – and we need entities like the VIDCOE to assist patients in our community with taking the necessary steps to prevent it. Investment in prevention and early treatment is a very good investment of our resources as it is much less expensive to care for these conditions and these patients when they are addressed early.

SRMC remains an advocate for the expansion of all healthcare services in the Virgin Islands – especially those providing much needed preventative and outpatient care to all persons regardless of their ability to pay. Currently, SRMC is partnering with the VIDCOE in their efforts to expand their services in the St. Thomas/St. John District by offering special consideration on leasing clinic space for their patient visits on the 5<sup>th</sup> Floor of the Roy Lester Schneider Hospital in our newly renovated Specialty Clinic wing. We look forward to partnering with VIDCOE on future patient care and community outreach and education initiatives. SRMC will continue to partner with entities like the VIDCOE to promote access to healthcare for our community.

I want to thank our hardworking team at SRMC – both on St. Thomas at the Roy Lester Schnieder Hospital and on St. John at the Myrah Keating Smith Community Health Clinic - for all the excellent care they provide to our community on a daily basis - 24/7/365. We are continually working to improve in the services we provide. It is our mission to provide high quality care to our community and we want to encourage the public to trust SRMC with your

care. At SRMC, we have a highly skilled team of well trained and qualified providers that truly care about our patients, and we are supportive of the work that the VIDCOE is embarking on to add to the healthcare that is currently available in our community. We look forward to the addition of endocrinology services through the VIDCOE and we look forward to expanding our nutritional counseling services at SRMC.

As a reminder to the listening audience, if you or someone you love starts to notice any possible diabetes symptoms including urinating often, feeling thirstier than usual, blurred vision, tiredness/fatigue, headache, or irritability, we encourage you to contact your health care provider or reach out to the VIDCOE. The earlier your condition is diagnosed, the sooner the treatment can begin. And if you have already been diagnosed with diabetes, you need to be sure you follow your doctor's recommendations and receive close follow up until your blood sugar levels stabilize. We encourage everyone listening to eat healthier foods, get more physical activity, and lose excess pounds to achieve a better, healthier lifestyle. We can and will work together to continue to improve the treatment of diabetes in our community.

This concludes my testimony, and I am available to respond to any questions.