

Legislative Hearing Statement

July 22, 2026

Submitted by the American Cancer Society, Inc., Cancer Support VI, Inc., and the Yvonne Ashley Galiber Breast Cancer Foundation, Inc.

Honorable Senator Ray Fonseca, Chair of the Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services; honorable members of the Committee; distinguished testifiers; members of the media; and fellow Virgin Islanders.

On behalf of the American Cancer Society, Cancer Support VI, and the Yvonne Ashley Galiber Breast Cancer Foundation, thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's hearing. We appreciate the Committee's continued commitment to improving the health and well-being of the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands and welcome the opportunity to share our perspectives on the important matter of cancer care in the territory.

While we regret that prior scheduling commitments prevent us from appearing before the Committee today, we sincerely appreciate the opportunity to have our testimony read into the record in response to the information requested to your letter of invitation. We respectfully submit the following remarks and thank the Committee for its consideration.

The specific cancer incidence, mortality, prevalence, and surveillance data this Committee has requested are maintained by the Virgin Islands Department of Health, the USVI Cancer Registry, and related government entities — they are best positioned to provide that statistical picture.

What we can offer is ground-level experience. Our organizations work directly with cancer patients, survivors, caregivers, healthcare providers, and community partners across the Territory. Based on that experience, we'd like to highlight the barriers patients and families face and the programs we provide to address them.

Cancer Continuum Focus Areas

Our organizations collectively support efforts across the full cancer continuum:

- Prevention
- Early detection and screening
- Diagnosis and treatment
- Caregiver support
- Survivorship
- Quality of life

Barriers and Challenges Facing Cancer Patients and Families

Cancer patients in the U.S. Virgin Islands face a number of obstacles throughout their cancer journey which include:

Access to Care

Timely, appropriate cancer care remains a significant challenge. Many patients must travel off-island for specialized treatment not available within the Territory. Like many small and rural communities, the USVI faces difficulty recruiting and retaining specialists such as:

- Radiation oncologists
- Oncology surgeons
- Medical physicists
- Specialized oncology nurses

The Territory's Cancer Plan specifically calls for hiring these professionals to improve access to care.

Transportation and Lodging

Ground transportation, airfare, and lodging costs while receiving treatment away from home place a substantial burden on patients — and on the caregivers who travel with them. The stressors of these circumstances often add challenges to the healing process.

Physician Awareness of Locally Available Care

We've encountered cases where patients are referred off-island before it's clear whether the care they need is already available here. This is compounded by the ongoing closure of the hurricane-damaged Charlotte Kimelman Cancer Institute at the Schneider Regional Medical Center in 2017. This has temporarily narrowed the range of services available locally over the last nine years while we await its reopening.

Insurance Coverage and Financial Barriers

Insurance limitations, out-of-pocket medical expenses, and other financial hardships remain common obstacles to cancer treatment.

Medicaid (MAP) and Medicare Coverage Barriers

We are hearing reports of cuts and coverage restrictions to the Territory's Medical Assistance Program (Medicaid/MAP) and Medicare, driven by changes at the federal and territorial government level. We encourage the Committee to examine how these changes are affecting patients' ability to access cancer treatment, follow-up, and support services and what actions are possible to mitigate the impact of this reality.

Ancillary and Supportive Care Needs

Cancer care extends well beyond clinical treatment. Patients and families often need transportation, nutrition assistance, counseling, patient navigation, medication assistance, and caregiver support.

Separation from Family and Support Systems

Patients who travel off-island for treatment often face emotional and psychological stress from extended time away from family, friends, and community.

Funding Constraints for Community Organizations

Community-based cancer organizations continue to face funding constraints that limit our ability to expand services and meet growing needs across the Territory.

Programs and Services Supporting USVI Residents

Despite these challenges, our organizations work to bridge these gaps as best we can through the following programs and services.

1. Financial Assistance During Active Cancer Treatment

We provide financial assistance to reduce the burden of treatment, including:

- Ground transportation assistance to and from treatment appointments
- Air transportation assistance for medically necessary travel
- Financial support for services directly related to a patient's cancer diagnosis and treatment

2. Lodging Assistance for USVI Patients

We help eligible patients who must travel off-island for active treatment cover lodging costs during their treatment period, reducing financial hardship for patients and caregivers.

3. Cancer Screening Grants

We support free cancer screening programs for uninsured and underinsured Virgin Islands residents, including:

- Mammograms and related diagnostic testing
- Colorectal cancer screening procedures
- Pathology services associated with colorectal screening

These programs promote early detection — one of the most effective ways to reduce cancer-related illness and death.

4. Cancer Education and Community Outreach

Our organizations engage in public education and awareness through:

- Distribution of educational materials
- Participation in health fairs, community outreach events, and public health initiatives
- Support groups and conferences
- Promotion of cancer prevention, screening, and survivorship resources

5. Advancing Our Collective Missions Through Partnerships

Collaboration remains critical to improving cancer outcomes in the U.S. Virgin Islands. We work closely with:

- Healthcare providers
- Government officials
- Health and human services agencies
- Community and nonprofit organizations
- Churches
- Local cancer advocacy groups

Our organizations are also active members of the USVI Cancer Coalition and support implementation of the 2024–2029 U.S. Virgin Islands Comprehensive Cancer Control Plan through our working groups, outreach activities and informational initiatives. We have also published a Resource Guide to assist the community in finding the help currently available to our residents. Copies of the guide can be downloaded at usvicancercoalition.org.

Conclusion

Cancer affects not only the individual diagnosed, but also families, caregivers, employers, and communities throughout the Virgin Islands. While progress continues in prevention, early detection, treatment, and survivorship, significant challenges remain — particularly access to affordable care, transportation, specialty services, and financial support.

We respectfully urge continued collaboration among the Legislature, the Department of Health, healthcare providers, insurers, community organizations, and other stakeholders to strengthen the cancer care continuum from prevention through to survivorship for all Virgin Islands residents.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. We appreciate the Committee's continued commitment to addressing cancer-related needs in our community, and we stand ready to support efforts that improve the lives of cancer patients, survivors, and their families throughout the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Respectfully submitted,

American Cancer Society, Inc.

Cancer Support VI, Inc.

Yvonne Ashley Galiber Breast Cancer Foundation, Inc.