

Testimony of AARP in The Virgin Islands

In Support of **An Act Concerning Prescription Safety** in the Virgin Islands

Health, Hospitals, & Human Services Committee

April 22, 2025

Given by Troy A. de Chabert – Schuster, State Director, AARP in The Virgin Islands

Honorable Senator Ray Fonseca, Chair of the Committee on Health, Hospitals, & Human Services, and Senators of the 365th Legislature. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this discussion about protecting a patient's right to know about the risks associated with opioid use. As the State Director of AARP in The Virgin Islands and former pharmacy owner, I have seen the devastating impact of opioid misuse. AARP, which advocates for more than 100 million Americans, including the 22,000 in the Virgin Islands, is committed to supporting this body's ongoing bipartisan efforts to safeguard public health in our territory. **We urge the members to vote YES for the Opioid Notification Bill No. 36-0021.**

This bill complements prior legislative efforts that AARP has supported, including the establishment of the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP) and the creation of the Opioid Abatement Fund. Together, these efforts advance the work of combating opioid misuse and protecting public health in our territory.

The Importance of Notification

The opioid epidemic has had a devastating impact on individuals and families across the United States—and here in the Virgin Islands. A recent report from the Virgin Islands Department of Health mentioned that opioid-related ER visits have increased by more than 35% from 2020 to 2023, highlighting the urgent need for legislative action. Older adults are particularly vulnerable to the risks associated with opioids due to higher rates of chronic pain and medication use.

This legislation provides transparency and safeguards public health by requiring prescribers to inform patients about the risks of opioid use. Simply put, this is sound policy that reinforces AARP's national priorities that federal and state governments should facilitate health promotion, educate individuals about risk factors for prevalent conditions, and encourage self-management strategies to achieve better health outcomes.

Language Recommendation: Include Caregivers in Notification

While we agree with the content of the bill as written, AARP Virgin Islands strongly recommends one amendment to strengthen the legislation:

- Include caregivers in the required opioid risk notification process.

Caregivers—especially family caregivers—play a crucial role in the daily care and medication management of vulnerable patients.

They are often the first to notice adverse side effects, administer medication, and respond in emergencies. Including caregivers in the opioid risk notification process ensures better outcomes, safety, and continuity of care. Caregivers are part of the care team and **must be recognized** as such in law and in practice.

AARP's Commitment to Health Security

This bill further aligns with AARP's fundamental priority – health security. Our public policy framework supports initiatives that:

- Educate individuals on risk factors for prevalent health conditions.
- Provide resources to manage their own health.
- Encourage private and public investments in consumer health education.

This legislation fulfills all three priorities and supports our shared goal of keeping Virgin Islanders safe and informed.

Conclusion

The opioid crisis continues to cripple communities across the nation, and the U.S. Virgin Islands is not immune. Bill No. 36-0021 – The Opioid Notification Act provides a proactive solution to protect our older Virgin Islanders and their families, by closing critical communication gaps in healthcare.

AARP of the Virgin Islands urges the full passage of this bill and stands ready to support its implementation alongside community stakeholders, health providers, and policy leaders.

Thank you, Sen. Blyden, for introducing this important legislation, your leadership and commitment to protecting the well-being of our aging population is commendable. I stand ready to answer any questions.

