



Testimony Presented By

Honorable Justa E. Encarnacion, RN, BSN, MBA/HCM

Commissioner of Health

to

The Honorable Senator Novelle E. Francis Jr.

President

**35TH LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE**

on

Pafford's withdrawal from the Territory and the impact on healthcare services.

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1 Honorable Senator Novelle E. Francis, Jr. President of the 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands
2 of the United States, esteemed Members of the Committee of the Whole and those in the viewing
3 and listening audience, good afternoon, I am Justa “Tita” Encarnacion, Commissioner of the
4 Department of Health. Joining me are Assistant Commissioners Dr. Nicole Craigwell-Syms and
5 Rueben Molloy, Deputy Commissioner of Human Resources, Joan Jean-Baptiste, and Acting
6 CFO while Tatia Monell-Hewitt is on leave, Angela Henry. We are here today to testify on
7 Pafford Medical Services’ withdrawal from the Territory and the impact on our healthcare
8 services.

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10 I am presenting the Virgin Islands Department of Health's transition plan for ongoing operations
11 at the Eldra Schulerbrandt Long Term Care Facility, the Mobile Integrated Health Unit (MIH),
12 and the Maternal Child Health (MCH) Clinic and the Family Planning program. Our team
13 remains committed to successfully transitioning and placing the necessary personnel to ensure
14 continued service to our community. In addition to the transition plan, we will discuss the
15 outstanding payment owed to Pafford Medical Services along with our obligations under
16 Bill_35-0275 to support the processing of invoices for the Caribbean Kidney Center on St. Croix
17 and St. Thomas.

18 Before I proceed with discussing the transition plan, I want to take a moment to express our
19 gratitude to Pafford Medical Services for their commitment and invaluable service during our
20 times of greatest need. When Hurricane Maria devastated our Territory, Pafford deployed to St.
21 Croix as part of a two-part Emergency Management Assistance Compact, to provide essential
22 medical support that was nothing short of lifesaving.

23 Their collaboration with the VI Department of Health in establishing the Mobile Integrated
24 Healthcare program was a game-changer, ensuring that 1,800 homebound patients on the island
25 of St. Croix received the homecare they needed.

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27 In 2019, Pafford returned to St. Croix to reinforce our Emergency Medical Services. As the
28 Territory confronted an unprecedented global pandemic, Pafford, already on the ground, stood
29 shoulder to shoulder with us throughout the crisis.

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1 The federal emergency related to the global pandemic ended last year, and with it, the federal
2 funding that supported emergency services. Since then, we have been working to transfer some
3 of Pafford's staff to the VI Department of Health while also recruiting locally and nationally to
4 fill critical clinical positions. However, it's important to recognize that there is a global shortage
5 of clinical staff, which presents additional challenges.

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7 Prior to their departure, the Department contracted 10 staff members from Pafford Medical
8 Services across the divisions mentioned above. Despite the difficulties recruiting much needed
9 clinical staff we have developed and implemented the following transition plan.

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11 ***Eldra Schulterbrandt Long-Term Care Facility***

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13 The VI Department of Health team has been proactively transitioning from Pafford Medical
14 Services at the Eldra Schulterbrandt Long-Term Care Facility. The management team has
15 established and formalized work schedules for the clinical team to address the needs of the
16 facility's residents. To enhance Behavioral Health support, two (2) registered nurses from our
17 core Behavioral Health Services team will be providing additional nursing care. We also secured
18 General Funds through vacancy attrition, allowing us to extend employment offers within the
19 department to one (1) registered nurse and two (2) licensed practical nurses. One LPN began on
20 July 15, 2024, and another RN and an LPN are set to be onboarded on August 26, 2024.

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22 ***Mobile Integrated Healthcare (MIH) Unit***

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24 Pafford staff have been providing support to our Mobile Integrated Healthcare Unit. The agency
25 has also taken strategic steps to plan the transition of the Pafford team. Until the funding is
26 available to support the MIH, Acting Director Jacqueline Greenidge-Payne identified clinical
27 staff and community health workers to provide support to the patients enrolled in the program. In
28 addition, the nurse practitioner previously contracted by Pafford signed on with the VI
29 Department of Health as a volunteer on August 15, 2024, to assist Acting Director Greenidge-
30 Payne with clinical rounds.

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1 To date, the agency has requested personnel savings to support the hiring of 4 MIH team
2 members: one (1) nurse practitioner, one (1) registered nurse, and one (1) paramedic (1) EMT.
3 This request, totaling four (4) Full-Time Equivalents, was submitted on August 9, 2024, to the
4 Office of Management and Budget (OMB) (see attached cost assessment).

5 ***Family Planning***

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7 Pafford has contributed to our Family Planning Program by facilitating the placement of one (1)
8 obstetrician/gynecologist. We successfully extended an offer of employment, which has been
9 accepted. The physician has expressed a firm commitment to serving as part of the VI
10 Department of Health.

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12 ***Maternal Child Health (MCH) Program***

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14 Pafford has provided support to the Maternal Child Health (MCH) Program by placing one (1)
15 registered nurse. In the interim, we have assigned a qualified, certified medical assistant to the
16 Family Planning Division to assist the physician with patient care until an RN is hired for that
17 role.

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19 ***Department of Health's Outstanding Balance with Pafford***

20 The most recent payment of \$50,485.28 was made on March 7, 2024. The outstanding balance is
21 \$1,785,724.99. The Department has attempted to meet our payment schedule; however, due to
22 other obligations such as the off-island care for our behavioral health patients, we are unable to
23 do so.

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25 ***VI Department of Health's Responsibility Under ACT No. 8729, Bill 35-0106***

26 To quote ACT No 8729, Bill No 35-0106,

27 "Section 1. (a) The sum of \$700,00 is appropriated in the fiscal year ending September
28 30, 2023, from the General Fund of the Virgin Islands to the Department of Health for the
29 Caribbean Kidney Center.

30 (d) The sums appropriated in subsection (a) are available until expended."

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32 The most recent payment made toward the \$700,000 was on July 19, 2024, in the amount of
33 \$90,523.25. The outstanding balance is \$1,060,181.90 for the clinical services and \$78,000 to

1 satisfy the 10% Federal match. The projected cost of care needed to maintain dialysis services
2 until January 31, 2025, is \$973,325.20 for a total of \$2,111,507.10.

3 While we recognize that Pafford's departure may understandably cause some concern, I want to
4 assure the community that the VI Department of Health is fully committed to addressing any
5 gaps in our services.

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7 In conclusion, we acknowledge the global advancements in medical care, yet we recognize that
8 these innovations cannot replace the essential role of much needed, however costly medical
9 providers. The Department of Health remains committed to supporting healthcare organizations
10 throughout the territory by providing guidance and regulatory support to ensure the highest
11 standards of care for our communities. Additionally, we look forward to collaborating closely
12 with the Legislature to identify and implement the best possible solutions for our community.

13 Our Mission: *"To Reduce Health Risks, Increase Access to Quality Healthcare and Enforce*
14 *Health Standards"*. Senate President Francis, Senators, we stand ready to respond to any
15 questions you may have.