



**TESTIMONY TO THE COMMITTEE
ON HEALTH, HOSPITALS AND HUMAN SERVICES
BY DYMA B. WILLIAMS, RN, BSN, MJ, CPHRM,
INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF THE
GOVERNOR JUAN F. LUIS HOSPITAL AND MEDICAL CENTER
April 13, 2021**

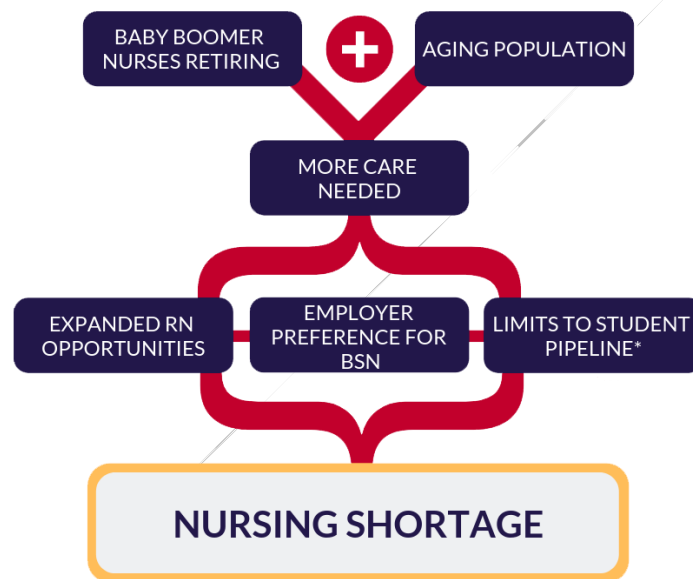
Good Morning Honorable Chairman Novelle E. Francis, Jr., Chairman of the Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services (“HHS”), Honorable Committee Members, Other Senators of the 34th Legislature of the U.S. Virgin Islands present, and the listening and viewing audience, my name is Dyma B. Williams, RN, BSN, MJ, CPHRM, and I am the Interim Chief Executive Officer of the Governor Juan F. Luis Hospital and Medical Center (“JFL”).

Our understanding is that proposed legislation, Bill number 34-0040, amends Title 27, Chapter 1 of the Virgin Islands Code by adding a new subchapter which establishes the Nurse Licensure Compact to create a multistate nursing license.

To date, legislation for the Nurse Licensure Compact (“NLC”) has been passed in thirty-four (34) U.S. states. For JFL, this is equivalent to thirty-four (34) opportunities for robust recruitment efforts in states that are members of the NLC. We believe that instituting the nurse licensure compact will result in streamlined licensure, as some of the burden of the licensure process will be relieved by the Virgin Islands Nursing Board. This will ultimately

result in a shorter recruitment process and allow JFL to fill positions quickly. Without question, we are in favor of this bill as the ultimate result would be improved access to care.

The shortage of nurses in the Virgin Islands is not a challenge that is limited to JFL or the Territory. It is estimated that by the year 2025, there will be a nursing shortage of half a million nurses in the United States. Below, we provide a visual representation of the factors driving the nursing shortage.



JFL is in support of this bill and we considered the NLC as the first step in conquering the nationwide nursing shortage and access to the critical care needs that our nurses meet every day.

Suggested Amendments

1. Funding for Robust Website

We would request that funding for the full implementation of an online-based application be allocated with the passage of the bill. Without funding for all costs of online implementation, this bill will have little impact on the speed of multistate nurse licensure. We provide a screenshot of the landing page of the Florida Board of Nurse Licensure website for ease of reference. This website includes the ability to apply, renew, check the application status, verify licenses and file complaints.



FLORIDA Board of Nursing

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Florida law provides that an initial application must be reviewed within 30 days. Below is the average number of days we are currently processing at.

Profession	Number of Days
Registered Nurse (RN)	3-5
Registered Nurse MSL Upgrade	3-5
Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN)	4-6
Licensed Practical Nurse MSL Upgrade	1-3

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2. For the Future, Nurse Retention Must Be Addressed

In addition to recruiting, this bill may also result in nurses choosing to leave the Virgin Islands. As such, retention of our hardworking nurses that are already here must be addressed. I cannot say enough about the dedicated group of nurses that ensure quality care for JFL's patients, every day. Every gunshot wound victim, every trauma victim, and every abused child on the island of St. Croix comes to JFL.



While recruitment is important, please do not forget our local, experienced, dedicated team members, who are culturally competent and have already vested in our community. We ask for this body's consideration of financial incentives for retention of our current nurses on staff, including competitive salaries for all nursing disciplines, a viable employee benefits package, and an attractive retirement package. We also request all support for the opening of JFL North, as a modern healthcare facility is important for staff satisfaction and ultimately nurse recruitment and retention. In addition, a housing purchase incentive would be attractive to nurses that are already employed at JFL or nurses that left the Territory and are

seeking home ownership on the island they call home. Lastly, we also ask this Honorable Body to take another look at Bill Number 33-0053, a bill which offered cash incentive payments, relocation payments and delayed retirement bonuses for nurses, teachers, corrections officers and police officers.

Conclusion

In closing, JFL thanks this body for taking a special interest in the recruitment of nurses to the Territory at this critical time. Thank you for inviting us to testify regarding this bill which addresses the nursing shortage and the proposed statutory intervention to address this shortage. We thank our current nursing staff for their dedicated service to JFL. Our JFL caregivers are truly warriors for healthcare on the island of St. Croix, to them we say “Thank You for your care and concern for our patients and your community.”

I want to thank Honorable Senator Novelle E. Francis, Jr., Chairman of the Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services and the members of the Committee for the opportunity to provide this testimony today. I would also like to thank the bill sponsor Senator Kurt Vialet for his vision and heart for healthcare. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have about this bill.