Testimony: Samantha Sabo, RN
Executive Director, Continuum Care, Inc. – St. Thomas and St. John

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. A common goal for us all is to enrich the lives of all Virgin Islanders.

My name is Samantha Sabo. I am a Registered Nurse with 30 years of experience. I live and work in St Thomas and serve our community daily. Currently, I am the Executive Director for Continuum Care Hospice in the St. Thomas and St. John District. I have worked in hospice in a leadership role in several states since the 1990’s. I have served a population in hospice in a large metropolitan area serving 16 counties. In all of these stateside locations, Registered Nurses pronounce death. I have never been involved in a death where foul play was suspected. Additionally, EMS and the police were never part of an anticipated hospice death.

When a patient is admitted to hospice services, they are certified to be terminally ill by 2 Physicians and death is likely in 6 months or less. Death in the hospice setting does not present as an emergency or a sudden event. The registered nurses assigned to care for these patients and families begin at day one to prepare for the anticipated death while affirming life each day. This care is provided in the patient’s residence. We are part of that process and build trust while providing physical, emotional and spiritual care for the patient and family. The dying wishes of the patient are key to their plan of care. I refer to hospice care and death as no less a miracle than birth. I liken it to birth in that it happens universally and miraculously once for us all and we have but one chance to get it right. That is why I am passionate as a Hospice Nurse, Director and Educator to help change the process in the VI. Mrs. Sanders has given much of the information and the facts needed in her testimony. I am hoping to further appeal to each of you. You may have had loved ones who have experienced hospice or you may in the future. We will benefit from a much-needed change in this current anticipated death procedure.

At the time of death, our families are instructed to notify Continuum Care as we are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. A Registered Nurse visits the home immediately. This is a most
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intimate and sacred of visits in which the hospice nurse is involved. Although it is often obvious by observation, but death is confirmed by the Registered Nurse by absence of a pulse and respirations.

Compassionate care for the bereaved and dignity of the deceased are of the utmost importance. The time of death is recorded and documented. With the current process in the Virgin Islands, the resources of EMS and VIPD are interrupted as they are dispatched to a death in the home, need to obtain directions and find the patient’s home and record required documentation. This entails leaving the deceased body untouched until EMS and the VIPD arrive. This postpones and often interferes with the need for compassionate care for the bereaved. When a Registered Nurse is able to arrive at the home and pronounce death timely, it reduces the trauma for the bereaved. It allows for the family to bathe, groom and redress their loved one. This is so important as this is often the last image and memory of their loved one. The importance of this ritual is immeasurable.

In conclusion, I fully support the pronouncement of death by a registered nurse, physician’s assistant or Nurse Practitioner in the Hospice setting.

Thank you. This concludes my testimony. I am open to your questions.