Testimony from Commissioner Justa E. Encarnacion  
Virgin Islands Department of Health

Before the

34TH LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, HOSPITALS AND HUMAN SERVICES

Chair of Committee
The Honorable Novelle E. Francis

on

The proposed legislation updating podiatry and Naturopathic sections of Title 27 of the Virgin Islands Code, and adding Board of Medical Examiners Member to Boards, so Podiatrist and Naturopathic Physicians can be licensed in the Virgin Islands. The Governor’s proposed legislation, Act No. 8435 and Title 27 (Podiatry and Naturopathic chapters) of the Virgin Islands Code.
Good day, Honorable Senator Novelle E. Francis; Chair on Health, Hospitals, and Human Services, members of the Committee and all other members of the 34th Legislature of the Virgin Islands of the United States and the listening and viewing audience. I am Justa E. Encarnacion, Commissioner of the Virgin Islands Department of Health (VIDOH). I have here with me today Dr. Nicole Craigwell-Syms, Assistant Commissioner, Dr. Tai Hunte-Ceasar, Medical Director and Deborah Richardson-Peter, Director of Professional Licensure. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the proposed legislation updating podiatry and Naturopathic sections of Title 27 of the Virgin Islands Code, and adding Board of Medical Examiners Member to Boards, so Podiatrist and Naturopathic Physicians can be licensed in the Virgin Islands.

The Office of Professional Licensure and Health Planning provides support for nine health professional boards. This division assists applicants who seek licensure within the territory to provide professional services. The Board of Podiatry has been established but lacks a quorum, and although the Board of Naturopathic Physicians was established, no members have been appointed to date. Physicians in both podiatry and naturopathic medicine are under-represented within the territory and quorum mandates are challenging. It is essential to have regulatory boards to provide oversight for their respective fields to ensure public health and safety. However, in the absence of quorums, the Board of Medical Examiners can ensure that the regulatory mandates outlined in the VI Code for podiatry and naturopathic medicine are adhered to. The likelihood of the Board of Medical Examiners maintaining a quorum ensures that these under-represented fields maintain the standards of care within the territory as outlined in the VI Code. The territory has a high number of persons with chronic diseases that contributes to the various conditions that require podiatry services as part of their plan of care. In addition, naturopathic medicine enhances treatment options and access to alternative care. This measure
would improve access to critical podiatry services and naturopathic medical options. Thank you, Senator Novelle E. Francis for sponsoring this legislation.

As always, I would like to thank the VIDOH staff for their strong support of the COVID-19 Mission. In conclusion, Senator Francis, the Department of Health is committed to reducing health risks, increasing access to quality healthcare, and enforcing health standards. As always, the Department commits to continued collaborative efforts with the members of the 34th Legislature. Senators, this concludes our testimony. Thank you for your support of our efforts as we fight to improve the Department of Health’s services to our community. I welcome the opportunity to respond to questions you may have.