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Governor Bryan Submits Proposed Legislation To Establish First Virgin Islands Telehealth Act

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS — Governor Albert Bryan Jr. has submitted proposed legislation to the 34th Legislature to establish the first Virgin Islands Telehealth Act, to increase opportunities for Virgin Islanders to greatly enhance how they manage their own health care and provide a greater range of health care choices.

The Governor's proposed legislation includes telemedicine and the standards that govern the practice of medicine and the provision of healthcare services using telehealth modalities by establishes licensing rules, standards of practice for telehealth providers, and authorizes the Territory's respective Boards to license telehealth providers to use telehealth to treat patients.

"We are particularly pleased to submit this proposed Bill to move forward in companion with the pending Behavioral Health Bill. As we have struggled to keep up with diagnosis, treatment and follow-up for persons under stress and evidencing elements of behavioral or mental health issues and substance use, telehealth will broaden the scope of providers who can assist in consulting on and treating such persons," Governor Bryan wrote in his transmittal letter to Senate President Donna Frett-Gregory.

The Governor's proposed legislation provides the Virgin Islands community with increased access to healthcare, consultation, recommendations, opinions, and follow up care options by:

- Providing health care providers with the legal authority to use telehealth in their practices.
- Defining what telehealth and telemedicine is and how it can be used by providers and patients for medical and health services.
- Providing medical and health care services at telehealth sites.
- Expanding the types of health care providers who can use telehealth in their practice.
- Increasing access to care.
- Requiring all telehealth providers to register with the Department of Health.
- Providing guidance for out-of-state telehealth providers.
- Broadening the definition of telehealth (that includes telemedicine) to provide greater flexibility for health care providers.
- Including provisions for health care providers who might not be covered by a board to practice within their scope of practice.
- Providing guidance on the use of telehealth in cases of emergencies, natural disasters, and pandemics.
- Establishing informed consent prior to receiving telehealth.

- Establishing parity for telehealth visits for insurance reimbursement.
- Adding penalties for violations.
- Adds terms and conditions that provide for medical malpractice & liability insurance
- Conforming to Centers for Medicare Services requirements so consultations given to patients by telehealth providers' qualify for reimbursement by Medicare, Medicaid, and other health insurance plans.

“The Telehealth Act is part of the Bryan-Roach Administration’s “Healthier Horizons” initiative to improve and upgrade the health care resources available to residents, along with our proposed Behavioral Health reform, the “Our Best Life” campaign focusing on the health of our seniors, the already enacted merger of EMS under the V.I. Fire Service and the launch of the Virgin Islands Diabetes Center of Excellence,” Governor Bryan said.

Healthier Horizons comprises 11 major initiatives to expand and upgrade healthcare for Virgin Islanders by increasing access to healthcare, modernizing the healthcare delivery system and facilitating the rebuilding of the Territory’s healthcare infrastructure.

The Bryan-Roach Administration is investing in the Territory’s people, infrastructure and future through transparency, stabilizing the economy, restoring trust in the government and ensuring that recovery projects are completed as quickly as possible. Visit transparency.vi.gov

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