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Governor Bryan Thanks Senator Novelle Francis Jr. For Bringing Forth the Governor's Behavioral Health Legislation

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS – Governor Albert Bryan Jr. on Saturday thanked Senator Novelle Francis Jr. for bringing forth the Governor's proposed legislation for a sweeping overhaul of the many laws scattered throughout the V.I. Code and put them under a comprehensive and overarching Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities Act to streamline the process that involves numerous government agencies, the Judicial System, the private sector and the non-profit organizations.

The proposed legislation, which Governor Bryan submitted to the 33rd Legislature in mid-January 2020, addresses gaps in services to children and adults who suffer from behavioral health challenges, mental health disorders, developmental disabilities, and alcoholism, and drug addiction.

"I want to thank Senator Francis for recognizing and acting on the critical and immediate need in the Territory for a functional and accessible mental health and developmental disabilities system that makes it easier and more effective to help some of the most vulnerable members of our community," Governor Bryan said. "Yesterday's Senate hearing was the much-needed launching pad to an elevated effort for real reform, and I look forward to the proposed amendments to the legislation to comprehensively address this issue confronting our community."

Senator Francis is chairman of the 34th Legislature's Health, Hospitals, and Human Services Committee.

The Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities Act would establish the USVI's first behavioral health, mental health, developmental disability, and alcohol and substance abuse facility.

The cross-agency coordination resulting from Governor Bryan's proposed Behavioral Health legislation will facilitate, establish and expand:

- Residential psychiatric facilities
- Community-based crisis services
- In-patient and out-patient behavioral health services with case management
- Medication-assisted treatment and associated recovery support
- Detoxification services
- Affordable supportive housing

The Act enables telemedicine and telepsychology through the use of psychological services via electronic transmissions, such as telephone, email, Internet, etc., to facilitate diagnosis and treatment when local

professionals are not available. The legislation also sets out the requirements for licensing and regulation of practitioners of Telemedicine and Telepsychology services.

A Division of Behavioral Health, Mental Health, Developmental Disability, Alcoholism, and Drug Dependency Services will be created within the Department of Health and overseen by a Director required to be a licensed medical practitioner in the field of behavioral health or mental health or a qualified professional who has had a minimum of five years training and experience in relevant social-medical problems and treatment services.

The Act also establishes Community Service Networks to coordinate and ensure continuity of care; establish a Crisis Intervention Program and Crisis Intervention Team; provide for Protective Custody for persons who may be a danger to themselves or others; provide behavioral health training for first-responders and education personnel; actively participate in competency hearings and other judicial proceedings and criminal issues relating to persons with behavioral and mental health problems.

In addition, the Governor's proposed legislation mandates the formation of the Behavioral Health Council of the Virgin Islands, a citizens advisory board comprising seven members, and the development of an enforceable set of standards for public and private treatment facilities.

As part of his Administration's commitment to providing adequate care and resources to Virgin Islanders who have mental health issues, substance abuse issues, or developmental disability issues, Governor Bryan partnered in May 2020 with local stakeholders and the Corporation for Supportive Housing to launch the V.I. Healthy Housing Initiative to assess housing and healthcare services in four key areas, including Behavioral Health; Youth Rehabilitation Services; Supportive Housing; and Elder Care Services.

In June of last year, Governor Bryan also launched the Healthier Horizons Initiative, which is built on a foundation of three tenets – increasing access to healthcare; modernizing the delivery of health services to residents; and facilitating the rebuilding of the Territory's healthcare infrastructure.

There are 11 primary elements under the "Healthier Horizons" umbrella designed to upgrade and modernize healthcare in the Territory:

- Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities
- Health Information Exchange
- Telehealth and Telemedicine Act
- Interstate Medical Compacts
- V.I. Fire Service and EMS Integration
- Emergency Medical Services Regulation
- Associated Health Plans
- Community Health Improvement Plan
- Healthy Housing Initiative
- Hospital and Health Facilities Improvements
- Medicinal Cannabis

The Bryan-Roach Administration is committed to transparency, stabilizing the economy, restoring trust in the government, and ensuring the disaster recovery is completed as quickly as possible.

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