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JFL Owed Debt of Over \$8.3 Million From Various Government Arms as Hospital Braces for \$21 Million FY2021 Budget Deficit

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Juan F. Luis Hospital and Medical Center By. ERNICE GILBERT FOR VI CONSORTIUM

At a Committee on Finance meeting on Tuesday, Senator Donna Frett-Gregory addressed serious collection issues from interagency debt and patient billing as JFL staff presented testimony toward the hospital's fiscal year 2021 budget.

An accumulative debt of over \$8.3 million is owed from various government agencies that received services from JFL. The V.I. Department of Labor's (VIDOL) Workman's Compensation debt of more than \$4.1 million accounted for 50 percent of the total interagency arrears, with the Bureau of Corrections (BOC) in second at over \$2.1 million.

“I know a lot of times because they think it’s government to government, they think that the debt should not be paid,” said Ms. Gregory. According to figures given from testimony, the government only paid \$275,000 to JFL within a year.

Ms. Gregory also noted that the finance committee continues to observe a trend of other agencies not including their outstanding financial obligations when they come before the senate requesting appropriation transfers. The senator said she inquired as to what JFL is doing to collect on delinquent accounts, particularly from VIDOL and BOC.

According to Shenel Moorehead, JFL acting chief financial officer, contact was made with the Labor Department to set up a payment plan, as they have the largest balance.

“At the time we were told that they just didn’t have the funding, so they couldn’t set up a plan,” said Ms. Moorehead about VIDOL. The other agencies in arrears were able to pay down something toward their debt.

Ms. Gregory plans to conduct further inquiry with the Department of Labor, as she recalled department officials previously stating that their Workmans Compensation payments were up-to-date.

Factoring in that projections and expenses for fiscal year 2021 may yield a \$21 million deficit, JFL officials said the hospital's entire staff continue to do weekly and sometimes day-to-day monitoring and financial planning. As a bright spot, the medical facility's Operating Room director and director of property and procurement succeeded at securing specialized equipment, materials, and products at competitive rates, as expressed by Ms. Moorehead.

According to Ms. Gregory, the testifiers on behalf of JFL continue to come before the senate as passionate and knowledgeable professionals. “This is the only team that comes before us that’s prepared to serve. It’s consistent,” Ms. Gregory praised as an example for others who come before the Senate.

Additional testimony was given at Tuesday’s committee meeting from Frederiksted Health Care and the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs for their proposed fiscal year 2021 budget.