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Planning 400 Surgeries in 4 Days, St. Croix Animal Welfare Center Faces Scrutiny from Veterinary Board

Veterinary Board Raises Questions on Aftercare for Mass Spay-Neuter Event

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A mass spay-neuter clinic planned by the St. Croix Animal Welfare Center sparked concern from members of the Virgin Islands Board of Veterinary Medicine that local vets would be stuck dealing with potential medical complications.

During Wednesday's meeting of the Veterinary Board, representatives from the Animal Welfare Center disclosed that eight visiting veterinarians would perform an estimated four hundred surgeries over four days in January 2024. Along with these eight, the center was also planning on rotating through "a string of relief vets, two at a time," according to Emily Weston, board president of the St. Croix Animal Welfare Center.

The second cohort of veterinarians are intended to fill the breach left by the coming departure of the center's permanent veterinarian at the end of November. Ms. Weston asked the Board of Veterinary Medicine for guidance on obtaining temporary licensure for all the incoming veterinarians. The work they would be performing, she says, is "a critical service to the islands."

Laura Palminteri, chair of the veterinary medicine board, explained that while temporary licenses are available to "incoming vets that are doing specialty services such as the spay-neuter events," the visiting vet must be first sponsored by a veterinarian who is already licensed in the territory. She also worried that following the departure of the temporary support, local vets would be burdened with additional aftercare requirements.

"You're talking about having eight vets come in for four days and do 400 surgeries. You're going to have some complications from those surgeries and when you do, your veterinarians are going to be long gone. That falls back on us," expressed Ms. Palminteri. Sponsoring veterinarians, she emphasized, will be forced to take accountability for any "malpractice issue."

Bethany Bradford from the St. Croix Animal Welfare Center, assured Ms. Palminteri that plans are to hire a replacement vet by January 2024, ensuring the center is covered. "We would...take responsibility for handling any post-op complications that come from those big events because we would have a vet there at that time," she said. However, Ms. Palminteri admitted that the hunt for a suitable candidate has been progressing slowly. "We've been searching for one for four months now," Ms. Bradford disclosed. Nevertheless, she expressed a commitment to interview more candidates to ensure that "we will have coverage at our clinic" after the temporary vets leave.

Despite voicing her concerns openly, Ms. Palminteri encouraged Ms. Weston to make haste with applying for, and sponsoring the 60-day temporary license for the eight veterinarians performing the 4-day clinic, and encouraged applications for permanent licenses as a more viable alternative for the relief vets.

"The permanent licensure is really going to be a much better, better option, even if they're coming down from time to time," she noted. "If they're coming down for two or three weeks a few times a year, I would highly encourage them to get a permanent license."