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Stalled Funds Threaten Dialysis Care on St. Croix as Hurricane Season Approaches

Nearly 2.5 years later, only a third of the promised funds have been disbursed, leaving patients vulnerable

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Another cohort of people impacted by the government's ongoing inability to disburse funds in a timely manner is now speaking out.

“Please release the funds promised in 2021 to assure a safe exit and return of patients on dialysis,” read the subject line of an open letter to Governor Albert Bryan Jr., dated April 21, 2024. Governor Bryan, in November 2021, had promised a [million-dollar allocation](#) towards the construction of an independent dialysis center on the island of St. Croix.

Almost two and a half years later, only a third of the promised money has been paid out, claims Walter Rohloff, head of the Kidney Clinic on St. Thomas. He and 47 co-signatories on the open letter to the governor claim that the 95 percent complete structure is still awaiting the release of the remainder of the funds to be able to open and begin operations.

The letter recounts the chaotic days and weeks facing dialysis patients following the devastation of the 2017 hurricanes. The storms “exposed the vulnerability of our local health care system due to lack of sufficient interconnectivity with mainland healthcare organizations,” the letter argues, describing the hurried evacuations of patients first to Puerto Rico, and then onwards to elsewhere in the mainland after Puerto Rico itself was hit by Hurricane Maria. “Many never returned.”

Now, on the eve of another hurricane season which experts are predicting may be a [record-breaking year](#), dialysis patients on St. Croix are “in an even more precarious situation than before,” the letter claims, since such treatment at the Juan F Luis Hospital still takes place in “provisional, now dilapidated dialysis trailers.” According to Dr. Rohloff and his co-signatories, one of those trailers “has already failed and the remaining one will be a poor match for any hurricane.”

The urgent release of the over \$600,000 that had been promised over 30 months ago would facilitate “stable, self-sustained state of the art dialysis care,” the open letter said, and would also “provide its dialysis patients with access and ease of transfer to over 300 mainland dialysis centers,” due to the affiliations of the new center’s operators.

Those needing dialysis to treat severe kidney disease are pleading with Governor Bryan to facilitate the release of the remaining funds “so that a solid and safe structure can replace the provisional trailer” on St. Croix, and so that officials can ensure that a solid evacuation and transfer plan exists ahead of the next natural disaster.

“The financial and emotional costs avoided by acting now are worth all the money,” the letter argues.