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Mobile Crisis Intervention Team Closer to Reality in USVI, But Lack of Funding Source Remains a Concern

Senator Capehart's proposal for a Psychiatric Emergency Response Team and 9-8-8 hotline gains traction, despite funding questions

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Nelcia Charlemagne **June 06, 2024**

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Thanks to the efforts of Senator Diane Capehart, the USVI is one step closer to establishing a Psychiatric Emergency Response Team to provide mobile crisis intervention services and formalizing the 9-8-8 telecommunication system.

Bill 35-0224 was [first introduced in February 2024](#) but was held in committee by its author pending necessary amendments to strengthen the draft legislation, after the amendment process was prematurely halted because of the early dismissal of that day's legislative session due to inclement weather.

On Wednesday, Ms. Capehart once again sought the support of her colleagues on the measure. “This bill actually addresses our behavioral challenges. This is like the infrastructure that we need to start to address the challenges that we face in the Virgin Islands,” she said.

Should the measure become law, peace officers, nurses, and Bureau of Corrections officers would all be trained to provide appropriate assistance during mental health episodes. It would also allocate \$1.1 million in funding to establish the 24/7 9-8-8 hotline staffed by therapists. The draft legislation was lauded by stakeholders including the Department of Health and the V.I Fire and Emergency Management Service.

Back in February, the funding source for the hotline was a point of contention for Senator Donna Frett-Gregory, who said that no specific pool of money had been identified. At the time, the Department of Health said it would meet with the Office of Management and Budget to identify savings in other areas that would free up already-appropriated funds for the purpose. With Ms. Frett-Gregory absent from Wednesday’s committee hearing, no discussion was had about whether the needed funds had been identified.

After receiving favorable votes by all five committee members in attendance, Ms. Capehart assured them that Bill 35-0224 — even as it lacks a funding source — is “very important legislation that we’ve just voted on.” Senator Ray Fonseca, chair of the Committee on Health, Hospitals, and Human Services, echoed her sentiments, describing it as “a great move in the right direction for the community.”

The bill will subsequently be voted upon in the Committee on Rules and Judiciary, chaired by Ms. Capehart.