

Bryan Seeks Swift Passage of Legislation to Replenish Depleted Medicaid Funds

Governor Bryan requests additional \$3 million from the Senate to continue providing expanded healthcare services amid increased demand

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On Monday, Governor Albert Bryan disclosed that the territory had “run out” of money to support the required local match for Medicaid. To ensure that Virgin Islanders can still receive services, he said that Government House had sent draft legislation to the Senate late last week asking that an additional \$3 million be allocated for Medicaid matching.

While running out of money is never a good thing, Mr. Bryan said that the issue was indicative that “we’re having so many people access care,” which he found encouraging. He noted that during the pandemic “we had almost 40,000 people” utilizing Medicaid to access services, which

were expanded to include “braces, fillings, dentists, different types of appointments,” according to the governor. Referral requirements have also been eased, making access to specialty care a little less onerous. “Before you had to go to East End or Frederiksted Health Center in order for them to refer you, now you can be referred from a regular doctor,” Governor Bryan pointed out.

All these factors combined, he said, has resulted in a rapid depletion of the matching funds. However, the governor does not anticipate that this will be an ongoing issue. “We expect next year it’ll be calmed down a little,” he assured, noting that the V.I. Department of Human Services has “kind of curtailed services a little bit.” The result? “The amount of people on Medicaid has gone down,” he made known.

Nevertheless, the additional \$3 million allocation is of critical importance to Virgin Islanders, the territory’s chief executive insisted. “If anyone has any doubt if this money is important, they only had to go to the [U.S. Department of Defense Innovative Readiness Training (IRT) Program] sessions this week.” The medics at the territorial health fair, Governor Bryan said, served over 2500 people who had come seeking the no-cost healthcare services offered by the military training program. Even that figure fell far short of the 6000 people who had applied for various services and procedures, the governor remarked. He noted that whether through Medicaid or not, the territory will end up funding healthcare for those who cannot afford it on their own.

“If they don’t have Medicaid or Medicare, they go to our hospitals, we still pay for it, it doesn’t make a difference,” Governor Bryan said, referring to uncompensated care. “We might as well make sure that people have a choice.”

The quest to adequately fund Medicaid in the territory is not new. While this latest effort is to shore up the pool of local matching funds, there have been previous successes on the federal side to bring more Medicaid money into the territory. In 2019, Congresswoman Stacey Plaskett was successful in securing an [additional \\$252 million](#) in Medicaid funding for the territory included in a fiscal year 2020 spending bill. At the same time, the federal match was boosted from 55% to 83%. Initially, the increased match percentage was scheduled to expire at the end of fiscal year 2021, but the measure was subsequently made permanent, ensuring that the territory now receives the [highest Medicaid match possible](#) for any state in the U.S.