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## **Pafford Medical Services to Depart USVI Due to Nearly \$10 Million in Unpaid Gov't Invoices**

**Pafford's departure impacts critical services including emergency response, cruise ship medical emergencies, and dialysis care. The departure could be life-threatening for several hundred dialysis patients**

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**An ambulance on St. Croix** By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

*Last updated at 6:53 p.m. on Wednesday, August 7, 2024*

Pafford Medical Services has announced its departure from the U.S. Virgin Islands due to accumulating unpaid invoices, making it untenable to continue operations in the territory.

According to a press release issued Wednesday, Pafford said that despite its unwavering commitment to providing medical care to residents and visitors of the USVI, the financial strain has forced this difficult decision, which was made with "deep regret."

Since its response to assist the USVI following Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017, Pafford said it has been dedicated to offering medical services, ensuring the health and well-being of the community. Medical professionals included physicians, nurse practitioners, registered nurses, paramedics, and other ancillary staff, who Pafford said have worked tirelessly to uphold the highest standards of healthcare, often going above and beyond to meet the needs of the USVI community.

Several government departments and agencies will lose medical staff, including the V.I. Department of Health, the Juan F. Luis Hospital & Medical Center, V.I. Fire EMS, and the Bureau of Corrections. The combined, accumulated debt is close to \$10 million, a sum the government appears unable to pay due to the severe financial crunch it is currently experiencing. Pafford said it is owed this sum by the aforementioned government arms, along with the Schneider Regional Medical Center. However, SRMC told the Consortium Wednesday evening that it no longer has Pafford staff and therefore will not be impacted.

The impact will be felt across the territory as Pafford managed many critical health services in the USVI. This includes ambulance emergency response paramedics, whose absence could severely affect the territory's healthcare sector. For instance, Pafford employees responded to medical emergencies on cruise ships. Additionally, Pafford provided services to several hundred dialysis patients in the territory, and their departure could be a matter of life and death for these patients.

Pafford said the substantial unpaid invoices have placed an insurmountable strain on its resources, and that despite numerous efforts to negotiate and resolve these issues, the lack of payment has led to the decision to withdraw services from the USVI. "We are deeply saddened to leave the United States Virgin Islands," said Clay Hobbs, Chief Operating Officer of Pafford Medical Services. "Our team has formed strong bonds with the community, and it is heartbreaking to know that our departure will impact the quality of medical care available to the residents. We have explored every possible avenue to remain in the USVI, but the financial situation has made it impossible to sustain our operations."

Mr. Hobbs told the Consortium that Pafford is a family-owned healthcare organization. "We've been in business for 57 years, we're not this huge conglomerate. When we pay payroll it comes out of our money."

Mr. Hobbs stated that the company has made efforts to stretch funds to meet the financial demands of patient care in the territory. He mentioned that in many cases, the company charges the V.I. government "far less" than what it charges other entities in the U.S. "We try to keep it as low as we can to spread those dollars because we have an interest; it's not just a job assignment to us, it is important to us. I know the patients, our staff knows the patients, we've been to their homes — we're the organization that a majority of the Virgin Islands public trusts, and they invite us into their homes at 2:00 a.m. when they have a medical emergency, and they know we're going to take care of them like they are our family. That's the part that pulls on my heart this afternoon," he said.

Mr. Hobbs added that while the company wants to maintain a good relationship with the Government of the Virgin Islands, it cannot continue providing services without payment, as staff members need to be compensated.

Further exacerbating the matter, the GVI has not been providing clear communication. "We just would like to have communication. If they would talk to us and say, 'we have a payment coming tomorrow,' or 'we're working on this.' We gave them some payment options and how we can work through this, and it's just been no verifiable response other than 'we're working on it.' Well, 'we're working on it' doesn't get us paid to pay our staff, and we're just to a point where we cannot spend anymore money while people are working."

Pafford said that effective Wednesday, August 7, 2024, all its personnel will begin departing the USVI. The company extended heartfelt gratitude to the residents of the USVI for their trust and support over the years. "It has been an honor to serve this community, and they hope that necessary steps will be taken to ensure the continuation of quality medical care for all residents," the company concluded.

Founded in 1967, the Pafford family of companies, with over 2,000 employees caring for more than 350,000 patients annually, provides healthcare services to communities across Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and the USVI.

Bryan administration Communications Director Richard Motta said a statement from the government will be forthcoming.

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