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Bryan Blames Hospital Leadership, Legislature for Healthcare Crisis; Says Epstein Funds Should Be Released Instead of Declaring Emergency

The governor says the Legislature controls \$130M from Epstein settlements and should act, claiming hospital leaders spent on raises while doctors report no anesthesia coverage, supply shortages, and critical care disruptions.

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Governor Albert Bryan Jr. on Friday pushed back forcefully against calls from Senator Ray Fonseca to declare a hospital state of emergency in the U.S. Virgin Islands, arguing that the Legislature already holds the funds necessary to support the territory's struggling hospitals and should take immediate action to release them.

“Absolutely not,” Bryan said when asked by WTJX if he would consider issuing an emergency declaration. “There’s no need for a state of emergency. The Legislature has the money. They need to do their job.”

The governor’s comments came on the same day that Senator Fonseca issued a press release reiterating his plea for a formal declaration, citing two recent letters signed by 106 doctors across the Virgin Islands. In his statement, Fonseca described what he called “overwhelming challenges and unacceptable conditions” faced by local healthcare professionals. He warned that shortages of staff, surgical supplies, and even access to blood through the Red Cross could lead to a collapse in hospital services.

Mr. Fonseca [previously called for a hospital state of emergency](#), highlighting in January ongoing staffing and equipment shortages, lack of basic supplies, and the deteriorating state of hospital infrastructure as key reasons for immediate action.

A March 24 [letter](#) from physicians at Juan F. Luis Hospital on St. Croix underscored the urgency. The doctors warned that staffing levels had dropped to dangerous lows, noting that the hospital has only one anesthesiologist who was recently on call for 11 consecutive days. Next week, they wrote, that physician would be off island, leaving the hospital with zero anesthesia coverage—meaning no surgeries, including emergency procedures, could take place. The letter also detailed frequent outages of essential lab tests, empty stocks of critical medications like tPA and antibiotics, and a \$22 million vendor liability that has cut off access to crucial supplies and repairs.

A separate [letter](#) from physicians at Schneider Regional Medical Center described a dire picture of day-to-day operations. Emergency Room physicians reported an inability to obtain critical lab results due to equipment failures and staff shortages in the lab and blood bank. Basic supplies such as urinals, IV tubing, and even diapers were reportedly unavailable. The situation has become so unstable that OB/GYN providers are referring out high-risk cases due to insufficient surgical supplies, and the Anesthesia Department is operating with only two anesthesiologists and no nurse anesthetists.

Additionally, the hospital’s Internal Medicine and Surgery departments emphasized their dependence on timely lab and imaging services, both of which have become unreliable. Surgeons reported shortages of essential tools such as sutures and implants, while internal medicine physicians expressed concern over their inability to access diagnostic tests like echocardiograms. “Despite this, we provide the best quality care that we can,” the letter stated, while calling for an “infusion of dollars” to address the growing crisis.

As Chairman of the Committee on Health, Hospitals, and Human Services, Mr. Fonseca emphasized the urgency of the matter, saying that multiple physicians have signaled the need for emergency intervention. “Too many hospital physicians in the Territory have raised their hand when asked if we are in a hospital state of emergency—underscoring the severity of the crisis,” the senator wrote.

He called on the governor to “act decisively to use any available funds” and suggested that the government explore the possibility of securing a short-term loan—\$20 million total, split evenly between the two hospitals on St. Thomas and St. Croix—to address immediate needs, including vendor payments, staffing, and equipment.

However, Governor Bryan responded by pointing directly to funds already in the Legislature’s control, referencing the over \$130 million secured by the administration from legal settlements

involving Jeffrey Epstein. “Senator Fonseca has access to over \$130 million of funds that were garnered by the administration from all the Epstein lawsuits,” the governor said. “If the hospital needs money, just give them the money. They have the money sitting there.”

Mr. Bryan added that even if he were to declare a state of emergency, he would still be unable to access those funds due to restrictions imposed by the Legislature itself. “Even in a case of emergency, we can’t spend the \$130 million,” he said. “That don’t make any sense.”

The governor also criticized hospital administrators for their fiscal decisions. “At some point, they’re going to have to make the executives at the hospital face facts and be accountable for the work that they’re doing,” he said. “They got the money, and they decided to spend it all in raises. And now they’re having to come year after year and pay those raises, making the budget inflated for the hospital.”

While Mr. Fonseca insists that a formal emergency declaration is necessary to unlock immediate action and stabilize the system, Governor Bryan maintains that the power to fix the issue already lies with the Legislature. “Our people deserve better—much better,” Fonseca said. “They deserve a healthcare system that is fully functional, adequately staffed, and properly resourced.”

Despite the disagreement on strategy, both officials appear to agree on one point: the territory’s healthcare system is under significant strain and requires urgent attention. How that attention is mobilized remains a matter of debate between the executive and legislative branches.