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Legislature Schedules Emergency Session to Address Hospital Crisis in U.S. Virgin Islands

Senators will meet April 14 to vote on a funding bill targeting critical shortages at JFL and SRMC hospitals. The measure comes after Governor Bryan rejected calls for a state of emergency, urging the use of Epstein settlement funds.

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In a move signaling the seriousness of the growing healthcare crisis in the territory, the 36th Legislature has scheduled an emergency session for Monday, April 14, to address the financial shortfalls plaguing both the Juan F. Luis Hospital and Schneider Regional Medical Center.

Senate President Milton E. Potter announced the session on Saturday, citing mounting concerns over staffing shortages, supply deficits, and operational breakdowns at the territory's two major

hospitals. “The healthcare of our residents is at stake. Our hospitals need our immediate attention. This is a matter of life and death,” said Senate Vice President Kenneth L. Gittens.

The decision to convene the emergency session follows a week of intensifying debate between the legislative and executive branches. On Friday, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. [firmly rejected](#) Senator Ray Fonseca’s renewed call for a state of emergency declaration, arguing instead that the Legislature already controls over \$130 million secured from Jeffrey Epstein-related legal settlements—funds that could be repurposed to support the hospitals without executive action.

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

Governor Bryan also criticized hospital leadership for spending existing funds on salary increases rather than long-term sustainability. “They got the money, and they decided to spend it all in raises,” he said. “Now they’re having to come year after year and pay those raises, making the budget inflated.”

Despite the political back-and-forth, the Legislature is now taking direct action. Lawmakers will introduce a comprehensive bill on April 14 that includes three core components:

1. **Dedicated Budget Allocation:** Specific funding earmarked for urgent hospital needs such as medical equipment, supplies, and infrastructure.
2. **Spending Restrictions:** Measures to ensure funds are used solely for critical healthcare purposes and not diverted.
3. **Accountability Framework:** Oversight mechanisms to monitor expenditures and enforce transparency.

Senate leadership—including Majority Leader Kurt Vialet, Finance Chair Novelle E. Francis Jr., Health and Hospitals Chair Ray Fonseca, and Disaster Recovery Chair Marise C. James—collaborated on the emergency measure following meetings with hospital physicians and administrators earlier in the week.

Those meetings came in response to two urgent letters, signed by more than 100 physicians across the territory, which detailed grave deficiencies in hospital operations. The JFL Hospital letter described a near-total breakdown in surgical capacity, with just one anesthesiologist on staff, looming supply outages, and \$22 million in unpaid vendor liabilities. At SRMC, doctors reported persistent shortages of critical supplies, lab failures, and dangerously inadequate staffing across multiple departments.

Senator Fonseca, who has been at the forefront of calls for emergency action, urged the government to pursue all available funding avenues, including a proposed short-term \$20 million loan—\$10 million for each hospital—to stabilize operations. “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,” Fonseca said in his latest appeal.

However, the governor maintains that the Legislature has full authority over the Epstein funds and should act without delay. “If the hospital needs money, just give them the money,” he said.

While the governor resists declaring a formal emergency, Senate President Potter emphasized unity and urgency. “We are committed to working together and with the Bryan-Roach Administration to ensure that the funds will be used responsibly and exclusively for the hospitals’ most pressing needs,” he said. “There will be a clear breakdown of funding allocations to prevent any diversion of resources.”

The April 14 emergency session will be held at 10:00 a.m. in the Capitol Building on St. Thomas.

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