

logo not found or type unknown

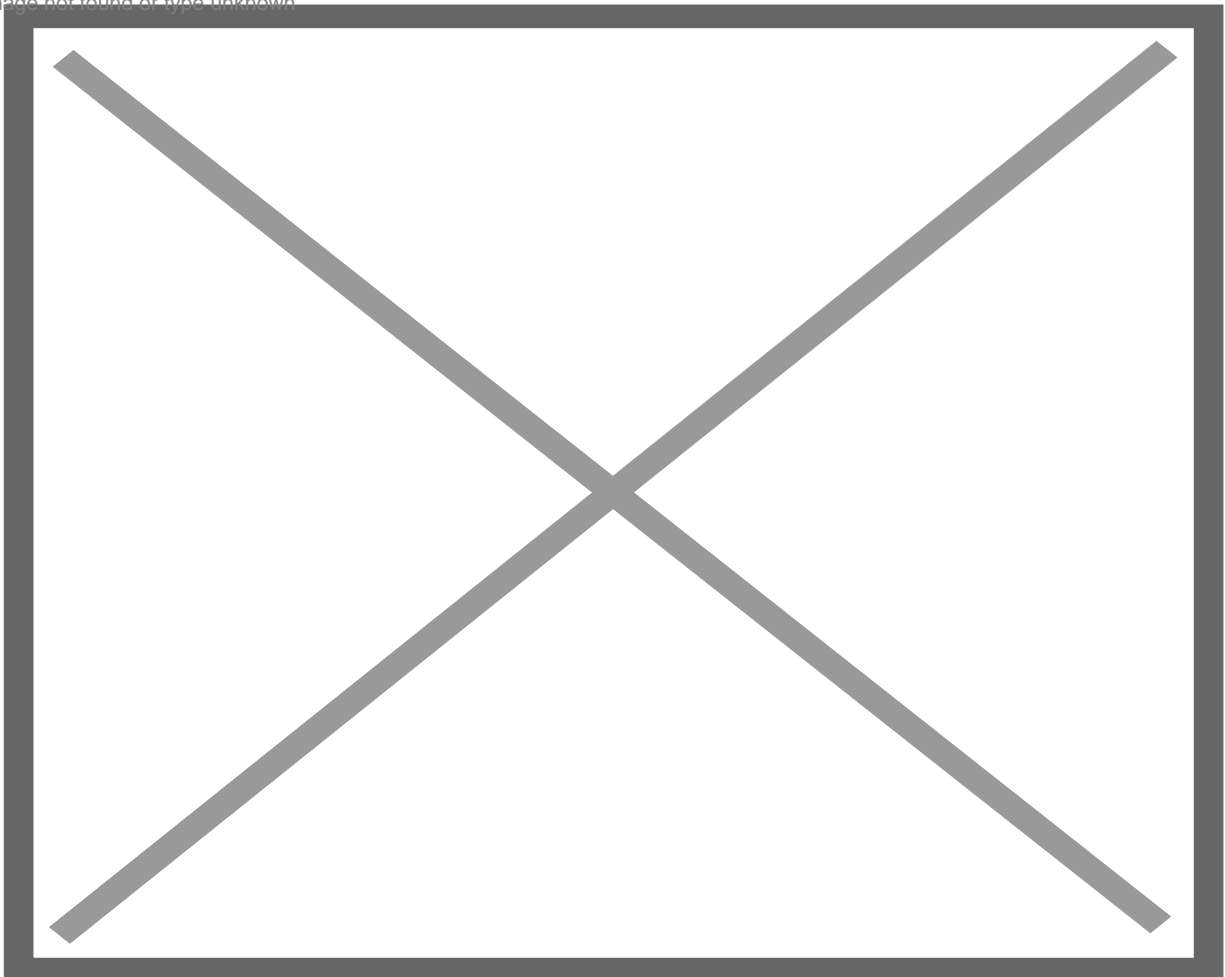
## Bill Mandating Opioid Risk Discussion With Patients Before Prescription Gains Senate Committee Support

**Bill 36-0021 would require healthcare providers to inform patients about the risks of opioid use, including addiction and overdose, as well as available alternatives. The measure received broad support and now heads to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary**

Health / **Published On April 23, 2025 07:18 AM /**

Nelcia Charlemagne **April 23, 2025**

Image not found or type unknown



On Tuesday, members of the Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services approved legislation that would require healthcare providers to discuss specific risks and alternatives with patients before prescribing opioids.

Bill 36-0021, sponsored by Senator Marvin Blyden, outlines a series of disclosures that must be made during medical consultations prior to issuing an opioid prescription. “Practitioners must

discuss the necessity of the prescription, available alternative treatments, and the risk of opioid use, including addiction, dependence and fatal respiratory depression when misused or mixed with other substances,” Blyden explained during the hearing. He added that medical professionals would be required to document these discussions in the patient’s medical record.

The bill includes exemptions for certain patients, including individuals undergoing active cancer treatment, those receiving hospice or palliative care, residents of long-term care facilities, and patients being treated for substance abuse or opioid dependence.

According to Blyden, the legislation is intended to enhance patient awareness about opioid-related risks and encourage informed decision-making, while also supporting broader efforts to address the opioid addiction crisis.

The measure has received support from several stakeholders. Troy Schuster, State Director of AARP Virgin Islands, strongly endorsed the bill. “We urge the members to vote yes for the opioid notification bill,” he said during his testimony. “The opioid epidemic has had a devastating impact on individuals and families... Opioid-related ER visits have increased by more than 35% from 2022 to 2023, highlighting the urgent need for legislative action.”

Calling the measure “sound policy,” Schuster added that it aligns with AARP’s national priorities. He encouraged lawmakers to include caregivers in the notification process, noting that they often play a “crucial role in the daily care and medication management of vulnerable patients.”

While generally supportive, officials from the Department of Health recommended narrowing the list of exempted patients. Assistant Commissioner Nicole Syms argued that such discussions should be conducted with most patients, regardless of diagnosis or care setting. “These discussions are essential, especially for vulnerable populations, and should not be omitted based on diagnosis or care settings,” Syms said.

Instead, Syms recommended limiting exemptions to “patients facing terminal illness and receiving hospice or palliative care.” Blyden welcomed the suggestion, and the DOH committed to conducting “the necessary due diligence to establish a robust framework for execution by healthcare providers and hospitals.”

The V.I. Department of Justice also voiced support for the bill. Attorney General Gordon Rhea described the proposed requirements as complementary to existing controlled substance laws, adding that they are “not intended to be cumbersome or to restrict the treatment options for either providers or patients.”

Most lawmakers responded positively to the measure. However, Senator Alma Francis Heyliger raised concerns about potential redundancy. “I know we try to codify things in the Code, but based on federal mandate, would it make a difference if this law passes or not?” she asked.

In response, Dr. Syms clarified that while elements of the bill are already being practiced, codifying them into law would “drive home the portions that should be covered.” She added that the legislation would reinforce consistent communication, ensuring that “it now becomes knowledge for everyone.”

Still, Francis Heyliger remained uncertain. “It’s confusing to me as a person. Why are we repeating something again when there’s so much regulation around this already?” she said. Despite her reservations, she ultimately joined her colleagues in advancing Bill 35-0021 to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary for further consideration.

