

Healthcare Protests Erupt on St. Croix and St. Thomas Over Staff Shortages, Unsafe Facilities, and Supply Gaps

From the lack of basic supplies to aging infrastructure and staffing shortages, Tuesday's protests in STT and STX gave voice to mounting frustrations over deteriorating public healthcare, with leaders pledging change and advocates offering support.

Health / **Published On July 09, 2025 05:29 AM /**

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Protesters gather outside JFL Hospital on St. Croix, Tuesday, July 8, 2025, to voice concerns over staffing, supplies, and working conditions. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM.

Simultaneous protests on St. Thomas and St. Croix on Tuesday highlighted growing frustrations with the territory's public healthcare system.

A smattering of people gathered outside the Governor Juan F. Luis hospital to decry the conditions under which healthcare professionals must work, and the resulting impact on healthcare delivery on St. Croix.

“We are in an unsafe building,” said one protester, noting that JFL's modular units have long surpassed their intended lifespan. Chronic short-staffing and the lack of equipment and supplies were also issues highlighted by protesters.

“Every day, I have nurses calling me telling me they ain't got supplies to wash their hands. They don't have toilet paper...they don't have feeding tubes for the babies. They don't have the oximeters to check oxygen levels,” claimed Cleopatra Peter, a chiropractic doctor identified by JFL as one of the organizers of Tuesday's protests.

Following calls for her resignation, JFL CEO Darlene Baptiste came out to meet with protesters, a decision that was welcomed by the disgruntled residents. “It's nothing for us to hide behind,” said Ms. Baptiste. “We do have a lot of challenges, but at the end of the day I am extremely hopeful.”

According to the CEO, the recent \$6.5 million in emergency funding has been almost completely expended thus far, “but that's dealing with the arrears. That's not the real time costing of what it costs us to do business.”

Noting that uncompensated care is a huge factor in terms of cost, Ms. Baptiste asserted that “it'll take us a while, just like any big boat or ship, to navigate and turn things around.” Nevertheless, she assured St. Croix residents that “our team is working.”

Specific complaints articulated during the protest are being addressed, the CEO said. “The guys are actually working on it as we speak right now to have the flooring reinforced,” she informed those gathered outside. With regards to the systems breach that forced the hospital back to utilizing paper records, Ms. Baptiste said that JFL hopes to be back online “within the next month, month and a half.”

As mentioned in previous testimony before the V.I. Legislature, Ms. Baptiste noted that the hospital has now “negotiated a contract with a mainland firm in reference to our revenue management cycle and our revenue integrity.” This and other initiatives, it is hoped, will strengthen JFL's billing and collections system, thus ensuring a healthier revenue stream for the hospital.

Protesters, rallying under the banner of The People's Choice, an citizen advocacy group, tempered their critique of the status quo with offers to band together to assist the hospital in meeting its needs and by extension, the needs of Crucians requiring healthcare services.

Karen Dickenson, one of the protest's organizers, vowed to assist in collecting and shipping a trailer of needed medical supplies for hospital operations, as well as discussing the potential replacement of a portable x-ray machine. “I honor you for coming out here and standing with us and having a conversation and a dialog,” Ms. Dickenson said to Ms. Baptiste. “That is the only way because this is our community....I appreciate you for your time.”

JFL leadership will now meet with members of the People's Choice movement this coming Friday to continue the discussion, an outcome confirmed by a press release issued by the hospital on Tuesday evening.

Meanwhile, protesters on St. Thomas did not have such an interaction with officials of the Schneider Regional Medical Center. In even smaller numbers than their counterparts on St. Croix,

concerned residents of St. Thomas nevertheless made their voices heard. “We need to save our hospitals,” said Margaret Price. “They don't have the supplies, they don't have the staffing that they need to take care of the people.”

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