

logo not found or type unknown

## UVI President Urges Medical School as USVI Ranks Last in Nation for Primary Care Physicians

**The USVI has the fewest primary care doctors per capita nationwide, with STT formally designated a Health Professional Shortage Area. Dr. Safiya George says a medical school and residency programs are critical to reversing worsening healthcare outcomes.**

Health / **Published On September 09, 2025 06:00 AM /**

Nelcia Charlemagne **September 09, 2025**

Image not found or type unknown



**Demonstration at the UVI Medical Simulation Center on St. Croix in May 2024, part of a mass casualty exercise with local first responders. The center is planned to function as part of the future UVI Medical School. By. UVI**

The U.S. Virgin Islands has the lowest number of primary care physicians per capita in the country, according to a 2024 report, and St. Thomas is formally designated a “Health Professional

Shortage Area” and a medically underserved area. Before lawmakers on Monday, University of the Virgin Islands President Dr. Safiya George said these realities underscore why the territory “definitely and desperately” needs its own medical school.

George appeared before the Committee on Rules and Judiciary to defend her nomination to the Virgin Islands Government Hospitals and Health Facilities Corporation Board of Directors. Having received a favorable vote, she will now be able to support healthcare facilities territorywide in addition to her current service on the St. Thomas/St. John board.

Her testimony highlighted long-standing staffing gaps that are “putting a strain on our healthcare system.” She said the lack of medical professionals is making it difficult for residents to access “even basic care.”

“Nursing shortages continue to be a pressing concern, driven by high turnover, non-competitive salaries and difficult working environments,” Dr. George told senators. She added that while UVI has a strong nursing program, it remains limited in the levels of training it can provide.

“We do not yet have a medical school or residency program to grow our own pipeline,” she continued. Dr. George argued that residency programs at both hospitals are necessary and that “at least a percentage of them will stay here and understand the local context.”

Committee chair Senator Carla Joseph described George’s testimony as “riveting” and asked how she intended to balance her dual roles as UVI president and a hospital board member to confront the problem.

Beyond primary care, the shortages extend to mental health and dental professionals, according to George. She linked these gaps to elevated “morbidity and mortality for heart disease, stroke, diabetes, [and] amputations” in the Virgin Islands.

UVI’s president reaffirmed that building a medical school is central to the university’s mission. “We need people trained in the Virgin Islands, in medical education so that they can practice here,” she said.

“We’re hoping to be able to start a medical school and start enrolling by fall 2027,” Dr. George announced, calling the need for expanded medical education in the Caribbean and the United States “vast.” She acknowledged that the effort has struggled to gain traction, with failed accreditation bids [in 2015](#) and [again in 2022](#). Lawmakers earlier this year suggested that a School of Allied Health could be a more feasible option.

Even with the [opening of a medical school in the British Virgin Islands](#) last year, Dr. George maintained that demand remains strong. “There’s still a huge need to be able to train qualified physicians for the territory as well as for the region,” she told the committee, reiterating UVI’s determination to establish a medical school in the U.S. Virgin Islands.