

Lawmakers Confront Elder Abuse Housing Crisis as DHS Confirms Only Two Beds Open at Queen Louise, With Herbert Grigg Near Capacity

During testimony on Bill 36-0099, DHS officials warned that seniors in imminent danger of abuse have almost no safe housing options, with Queen Louise offering two female beds and Herbert Grigg stretched to near capacity, leaving elders with few options.

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The territory is struggling with safe housing options for victims of elder abuse. That sobering reality formed part of the discussion on Bill 36-0099, draft legislation seeking to provide additional protections to the territory's senior citizens.

Senator Avery Lewis wondered whether “safe, accessible housing and support services” are readily available should protective orders require it. The response from Department of Human Services Assistant Commissioner Taetia Phillips-Dorsett, was not positive. “Tight now, unless another family member is willing and able, or a friend or a church member is able to take that resident who is in a precarious position of being abused into their home temporarily. The only options we have at DHS right now is to place them within one of our homes for the aged,” she stated.

Space at these facilities, however, is extremely limited. According to Ms. Phillips-Dorsett, at the Queen Louise site, there are only two available beds, both are reserved for female clients. The situation is only slightly better at the Herbert Grigg facility.

While there are plans underway to [rehabilitate both of these homes](#) for the aged, a newer facility won’t offer much of a solution. The new Queen Louise Home will support 40 beds, while the Herbert Grigg site will include 60 beds. However, Ms. Phillips-Dorsett indicated that “our waiting list is going to take up all the beds, or almost all of the beds, once we put in who we have and who’s on the waiting list.” DHS will also have to prioritize relocating the so-called “boarders” [in the territory’s hospitals](#).

Ms. Phillips-Dorsett believes that there is scope for private-sector involvement in senior care. The territory should encourage private businesses to “open long-term care facilities, skilled nursing facilities, to help us manage the unmet need issue in terms of bed counts as a collaborative, collective venture,” she suggested to lawmakers on the Committee on Culture, Youth, Aging, Sports and Parks.

Senator Carla Joseph said the issue has been a central focus of her work. Since taking office in 2020, she has introduced a comprehensive bill addressing assisted care communities and assisted living facilities, stressing that its success will require broad collaboration. While acknowledging that the current administration may not prioritize building new facilities, Joseph argued that elders still need safe spaces where they can receive proper care.

For Heather Henry of DHS’s Adult Protective Services division, housing is one of the resources in short supply. Housing and other “lackings” tend to “frustrate the process,” she told Senator Marvin Blyden.

Senator Alma Francis Heyliger also disclosed that she has spent considerable time working on solutions for various challenges faced by older Virgin Islanders. Among the initiatives being developed is the creation of an “adult foster care system.” According to Francis Heyliger, “the same way we could help out the little kids, we could help out the big adults as well.”