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## Board of Nurse Licensure Says USVI Lost About 400 Nurses While Testing and Payment Systems Lag

Officials said about 400 nurses have been lost from the territory's active pool, while money-order-only payments, limited exam sites, a stalled continuing education contract and the need for NCLEX access on St. Croix remain unresolved.

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Outdated payment processing, limited testing access and a decline of roughly 400 licensed nurses in the territory dominated Monday's budget hearing for the V.I. Board of Nurse Licensure, where officials defended an \$856,373 request for fiscal year 2027.

The Board's team, led by Executive Director Carmen Vanterpool-Romney, appeared before the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance and said the requested funding is needed to

“maintain its operations.”

A major part of the discussion centered on the Board’s expanded St. Croix site, which carries an additional monthly rent cost of \$1,600. According to Ms. Vanterpool-Romney, the new facility will serve as a “testing center for certified nursing assistants, incorporating advanced computer adaptive testing.” Renovations will begin “once funding is available...”

The Board of Nurse Licensure frequently relies on the University of the Virgin Islands or the Raphael O. Wheatley Skill Center for testing space. Ms. Vanterpool-Romney said she hopes the new site will allow BNL to better schedule exams.

Senator Kurt Vialet said he is hopeful that the site could eventually become NCLEX-certified, which would remove the need for candidates to travel to St. Thomas or Miami for the exam. “It’s going to save a tremendous amount of money,” he said.

Ms. Vanterpool-Romney said 21 nurses from both districts have been approved for testing.

However, becoming certified as a testing site presents challenges. According to Ms. Vanterpool-Romney, certifying agencies have explained to BNL that “the number of [people] per capita” influences accreditation. Because of the territory’s small population, certification may be difficult for St. Croix.

Senator Vialet urged persistence. “We’re islands separated by water. This isn’t a little rural community in Florida that could drive someplace. It’s a lot more expensive. So I’m hoping that we win that argument.”

Expanded on-island testing could help address the territory’s nursing workforce decline. Ms. Vanterpool-Romney told Senator Angel Bolques Jr. that “based on the statistical data that we have here, we could say we lost approximately 400 nurses.”

The Board tracks whether nurses are now working outside the territory or whether they have not renewed their license and moved into other roles.

Ms. Vanterpool-Romney could not speak to broader retention efforts, but said burnout is a wider problem. “Nurses are getting burnt out. It’s not just the Virgin Islands. We are losing nurses all over the United States.”

Licensing nurses is the Board’s source of revenue. In FY2025, BNL generated \$179,708, an increase over FY2024 revenue of \$163,462. The Board explained, however, that revenues are higher in odd-numbered years.

As of May 29, 2026, BNL had generated \$89,530 in total revenue from licenses, examinations, certifications, renewals, penalty fees and “other related services.” In the current fiscal year, BNL has processed 1,661 “active licenses for nurses eligible to practice within the territory,” Ms. Vanterpool-Romney said.

The Board’s payment system was also scrutinized. Currently, all fees associated with licensure, endorsements, renewals and related services are paid by money order, a process lawmakers and board officials described as outdated and inefficient.

Operations Director Jocyelyn McFarlande said BNL has solicited services to create an electronic payment portal. She said the Board is “starting from scratch.”

Senator Violet questioned why the Board would have to develop a system independently. “Being able to pay electronically isn't something that the government don't already have in place in other departments. So it should not be to reinvent the wheel,” he stated.

Senator Novelle Francis agreed. “I'm hoping by the conclusion of this budget process that we'll get the Department of Finance and others to understand the importance of us being able to have all of the revenue entities be able to accept online payment,” he stated.

The Board of Nurse Licensure is also seeking execution of a no-cost Continuing Education Broke Contract that has been stalled between the Departments of Health and Property and Procurement for three years. Lawmakers questioned why the contract has not moved forward and promised to inquire about its status.

BNL's FY2027 request of \$856,373 includes \$486,000 for personnel costs for eight employees and \$247,736 for fringe benefits. Another \$122,637 is allocated for supplies.

The Board hopes to eventually hire three more employees, including one person to manage the Nurse Licensure Compact once it is fully implemented. Ms. Vanterpool-Romney testified that an additional \$6,000 will be needed to cover annual dues.