

Bryan Renews Call for 1% Salary Tax Referendum to Support Healthcare Amid \$80 Million Uncompensated Care Burden

After providers warned lawmakers about uncompensated care costs, Bryan renewed his call for a referendum on a 1% salary tax, saying hospitals and clinics carry about \$80 million annually and that political candidates must say how they would close the gap.

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On the heels of a Senate budget committee hearing where major service providers lamented the high cost of uncompensated healthcare, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. has once again urged lawmakers to consider holding a referendum on adding a dedicated tax to support healthcare in the territory.

“Are we willing to pay 1% of our salaries towards healthcare, towards the homelessness, towards the mental illness, towards all the people who abandon their loved ones in the hospital,” Governor Bryan asked during a press briefing on Tuesday, noting that hospitals and clinics are carrying approximately \$80 million in annual uncompensated healthcare costs.

Noting that the Virgin Islands has been lobbying the federal government for a more equitable [reimbursement and compensation framework for healthcare funding](#), Governor Bryan argued that more needs to be done within the territory to reduce the burden of uncompensated care. “Over eight years, that’s \$640 million in care that was not compensated for. Where does the money come from?”

The recent consolidation of some aspects of the management and operational structure in the territory’s two main hospitals can help, but those cost savings will not be enough to solve the problem, Governor Bryan said. The current crop of lawmakers are avoiding the thorny issue, he declared. “I listen to politicians now running for office, clearly saying the problem, but nobody is saying how do you fix it. How do you make up \$80 million a year?”

According to the governor, a 1% tax on salaries would raise at least \$32 million annually, “\$16 million in each hospital...that’s a start,” he declared. He challenged those currently occupying seats in the legislature, as well as those seeking political office in the upcoming general election to put the question to the people. “We can’t keep complaining about the problem if the legislature ain’t even willing to put it...on a ballot to let people vote on it. What are our politicians saying?”

Even as the Virgin Islands pursues major capital projects to replace the territory’s healthcare infrastructure, Governor Bryan warns that “we still gotta maintain them, we still gotta find the money to take care of the uncompensated care.”

The status quo, he says, “is just not sustainable.” Governor Bryan first broached the idea of a referendum on increasing taxes in order to fund healthcare during his [January State of the Territory address](#).