

Task Force Proposed to Address Hospital Uncompensated Care, VIWMA and WAPA Financial Obligations

Bryan's proposed task force would pair senior finance officials with Senators Novelle Francis, Kurt Vialet, Marvin Blyden and Avery Lewis to review bond-financing options, uncompensated-care costs, VIWMA and WAPA obligations, and structural reforms now.

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Governor Albert Bryan Jr. is moving to form an eight-member Financial Solutions Task Force that would explore bond-financing options and structural reforms for long-standing obligations affecting the territory's hospitals and health care centers, the V.I. Waste Management Authority and the V.I. Water and Power Authority.

The proposed advisory body would bring together senior financial officials from the Bryan administration and members of the 36th Legislature to address financial pressures at some of the territory's most critical public institutions. Its work would focus on uncompensated-care costs carried by hospitals and health care centers, as well as long-term obligations at VIWMA and WAPA.

Under the proposed structure, Office of Management and Budget Director Julio Rhymer and Senator Novelle E. Francis Jr., former Senate president and current chairman of the Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance, would lead the task force.

Governor Bryan said he has secured Senator Francis's commitment to cooperate in support of a collaborative approach that includes both the executive and legislative branches. As part of those discussions, Senator Francis recommended Senators Kurt Vialet, Marvin Blyden and Avery Lewis to participate in the task force's work.

The proposed executive branch members are Department of Finance Commissioner Kevin McCurdy, Virgin Islands Public Finance Authority Executive Director Nathan Simmonds and Division of Personnel Director Cindy Richardson.

"This is a proactive and timely opportunity for both branches of government to confront a challenge that has been allowed to grow for far too long," Governor Bryan said.

He added, "These institutions provide essential services, but their accumulated obligations continue to place pressure on the central Government, the Legislature and taxpayers. We have an opportunity to bring the necessary expertise together and develop a responsible path forward."

Mr. Bryan said he expects the task force to move with purpose and discipline once its structure is finalized. While the financial challenges developed over decades and require careful analysis, he said the continuing effects of inflation have increased operating costs for public institutions while also placing additional financial pressure on Virgin Islands families.

"We are at a point where we have to move swiftly but deliberately," Governor Bryan said. "The cost of goods, services, equipment, energy and health care continues to rise, and those pressures are being felt by these institutions and by families across the Territory. We must do the work carefully, but we must also recognize that delay carries a cost."

The administration said it remains in active correspondence with Senate President Milton Potter regarding the Legislature's institutional engagement in the initiative and welcomes continued support as the proposed structure is finalized.

The Financial Solutions Task Force is envisioned as a collaborative advisory body convened by the governor to provide a structured forum for executive officials and participating senators to exchange expertise and develop policy and financing recommendations.

It is not being proposed as a standing, special or select committee of the 36th Legislature. Any recommendations requiring legislative action would be submitted for consideration through the Legislature's established procedures.

"Our objective is not to create another layer of government or a committee that produces discussion without results," the governor said. "We are bringing together individuals with the financial knowledge, legislative experience, institutional understanding and people-centered approach necessary to develop practical solutions to a problem that has persisted for decades."

The initiative follows a June 25 meeting at Government House on St. Thomas between Governor Bryan, Lieutenant Governor Tregenza A. Roach and members of the 36th Legislature.

During that meeting, the governor presented lawmakers with a proposal to explore bond financing as a way to address legacy obligations affecting critical semiautonomous entities, instrumentalities and component units, including the territory's hospitals and health care centers, VIWMA and WAPA.

The proposed task force would build on those discussions by evaluating possible bond-financing structures, reviewing the operating models of the affected entities and examining their expenses, administrative costs and revenue sources.

According to the administration, the task force's work would be deliberate and comprehensive, recognizing that any viable solution must address both the accumulated obligations and the underlying financial and operational conditions that contributed to them.

Any recommended financial relief would be accompanied by stronger oversight, effective cost controls and structural reforms intended to prevent the same obligations from accumulating again.

"This cannot simply be an exercise in refinancing debt," Governor Bryan said. "We must also correct the conditions that allowed these obligations to grow. Public support must come with public accountability, and every entity receiving taxpayer assistance must demonstrate that its resources are being managed responsibly."

The territory's hospitals and health care centers continue to absorb uncompensated-care costs from treating uninsured and underinsured patients who cannot afford to pay. VIWMA is moving forward with solid-waste fees intended to strengthen its revenue base, while WAPA continues restructuring efforts aimed at improving efficiency and financial stability.

The task force would also examine executive compensation, administrative expenses and other operating costs as part of its broader review.

"Our hospitals and health care centers cannot continue carrying uncompensated-care costs without a workable solution, and VIWMA and WAPA cannot continue returning to the central Government and the Legislature for repeated emergency support," Governor Bryan said. "We must address the debt while also placing these institutions on a more disciplined and sustainable footing."

Once its structure and membership are finalized, the task force would develop financing options and recommendations for structural reform for consideration by the governor and the Legislature. Its objectives would include reducing long-term debt, protecting essential services, strengthening financial oversight and limiting recurring demands on taxpayers.

"These challenges did not develop overnight, and they will not disappear on their own," Governor Bryan said. "My administration is taking the initiative, actively engaging our legislative partners and pursuing a collaborative solution that protects essential services and strengthens the financial future of the Virgin Islands. We will move responsibly, but we will also move with the urgency the present moment demands."