

The Virgin Islands Consortium

JFL Seeking Top-Level Management To Fill Key Roles; Former Employee Files Suit

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The Juan F. Luis Hospital and Medical Center (JFL) is currently on the search to hire "several high-level executive leadership team staff members to fulfill JFL's senior ranks," according to a press release issued by the hospital on Thursday night.

The information was revealed Thursday during a meeting of the St. Croix District Governing Board. There, JFL Hospital CEO Dr. Kendall Griffith stated, "We are pursuing careful and deliberative recruitment efforts to attract and retain highly skilled professionals to join our leadership team. These employees will provide critical support for the Hospital's management platform to ensure improved accountability, legal guidance, financial planning and fiscal responsibility, as well as excellence in

administrative execution of JFL's mission and goals."

JFL is actively recruiting for the positions of Chief Operations Officer (COO), Chief Financial Officer (CFO), and Legal Counsel.

At least two of the positions have been made vacant with controversy surrounding them.

Sam King, who was hired as the hospital's chief financial officer in September, was fired from the role less than one month on the job. In testimony before the Senate Health, Hospitals, Human Services and Veterans Committee in October, Griffith told lawmakers that King turned out not to be "a good fit" for the hospital. He did not, however, provide information on King's work performance to justify the CFO's termination.

Prior to King's dismissal, Griffith also terminated another JFL CFO, Deepak Bansal, last year. According to Virgin Islands law, the hospital CEO is required to gain the advice and approval of the district hospital board or the territorial board, in the district board's absence, in order to hire or fire a CFO. In both terminations, Griffith did not receive that authorization.

In respect to the vacancy in the legal department, former JFL legal counsel Royette Russell was terminated from her post--one she held since 2008--on July 15. She is now suing the hospital and Griffith, alleging that she was let go in retaliation for being a whistleblower.

The lawsuit highlights a number of concerns Russell says she brought to Griffith's attention over an extended period of time until March 15 without seeing any results, including:

- Improper hiring and firing procedures of employees.
- Improper processing of hiring information.
- Improper procedures in determining employees' compensation.
- "Apparent favoritism as to some employees over others."
- "Not properly reporting matters" and failure to follow procedures; although it did not say what those exact matters were.

"Plaintiff made it clear that if Dr. Griffith did not cease the improper actions they would have to be reported," the lawsuit states.

It also alleges that Griffith took action against Russell by refusing to meet with her and stripping her of her responsibilities to oversee other hospital departments. Furthermore, the lawsuit alleges that the hospital CEO discriminated against Russell on the grounds of her being a woman.

"It started with his refusing to treat her opinions or proposals with the respect they were due and to be offended unless she agreed with virtually everything he said," the lawsuit states.

The suit was filed in October in the St. Croix district court.

Of his search to hire the new staff members, Griffith said, "As we continue to diligently implement the compliance parameters as outlined by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, JFL is taking steps to smoothly transition our leadership team to a fully staffed complement of skilled managers and strategic management professionals. We are currently interviewing candidates for each of the vacant positions and look forward to vetting our final selections."

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