

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Senators Meet With JFL Leadership, Hospital Plans Five-Bed Ward For Mentally Ill

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Cynthia Graham **February 02, 2015**



St. Croix Sens. Kurt A. Violet, Nereida "Nellie" Rivera-O' Reilly and Novelle E. Francis, Jr., recently met with Juan F. Luis Hospital (JFL) CEO Dr. Kendall Griffith and other members of the hospital's executive team in an effort to learn the "status and progress being made by the hospital" with respect to [mandates set forth](#) by Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' (CMS), and corrective measures the hospital is taking to achieve CMS compliance by August 2015.

Griffith assured the lawmakers that the hospital, which [narrowly escaped decertification](#) last October following a scathing audit by CMS in September, will be able to meet the compliance mandates, and that the "CMS objectives and corrective measures are

achievable."

The senators were on a fact-finding mission in order to fully understand the hospital's needs, according to information released from the Legislature.

"This meeting was to create a bonding between the hospital and the health committee," said Sen. Violet, committee chairman of health, hospital and human services. He added that the next step for his committee was to visit the Roy Lester Schneider Hospital in St. Thomas.

Sen. Rivera-O'Reilly, also a member of Violet's committee, said JFL still has a ways to go in fully being up to par with its services and much of it has to do with the Senate's ability to provide funding for the cash-strapped hospital, which, according to hospital officials, is [in need of \\$10 million](#) in order to meet CMS standards.

"We have to do something to find the funding. It rests squarely on our shoulders," Sen. Rivera-O'Reilly said.

A key concern expressed by Sen. Francis, committee chairman of homeland security, public safety and justice, was the hospital's ability to care for mentally ill patients. Francis said he was encouraged to learn of JFL's plans to construct a five-bed holding ward to serve those patients.

"Too many of our mentally ill residents are either incarcerated at the Golden Grove Correctional Facility or are homeless on our streets," Francis said. "As a law enforcement professional, I have seen the impact of our collective failure to provide adequate services to the mentally ill, who are often reported as disturbances in our residential and business areas."

The senators also addressed other hospital issues such as adequate staffing, and the need for improved internal and external communication. It was discussed that although JFL is doing good things within the hospital, those things are not being communicated to the community. Other factors such as nurse-to-patient ratio, care needs of the aging St. Croix population, and reducing hospital energy costs were also discussed.

Overall, the senators say the meeting was a positive one and noted that JFL patients have been receiving "quality care"; however, improvements are still needed.

Other members of JFL's executive team attending the meeting last Thursday included Dr. Ken Okolo, chief operating officer and Tim Lessing, chief financial officer. Erica Pinket, legal researcher from At-Large Sen. Almando "Rocky" Liburd's office also attended the meeting.