

The Virgin Islands Consortium

U.S. Senator Introduces Bill To Increase Medicaid Funding For Territory By Hundreds Of Millions, Mapp Hails Move

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ST. THOMAS -- Governor Kenneth Mapp commended and thanked Senator Charles "Chuck" Schumer (D-New York) for introducing legislation to provide parity for the Virgin Islands and other U.S. Territories in the federal Medicaid program and other U.S. healthcare programs, according to a press release Government House issued on Wednesday.

Senator Schumer is the second ranking Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee, which has jurisdiction over the Medicaid program, and is expected to become the

Democratic leader in the Senate in the next Congress.

The Senate bill would increase federal funding for the Virgin Islands healthcare system by hundreds of millions of dollars over the next 10 years. A similar bill was introduced in the House by Puerto Rico Resident Commissioner Pedro Pierluisi and co-sponsored by V.I. Delegate Stacey Plaskett.

The Schumer bill would lift the annual cap on federal Medicaid payments to the Virgin Islands and other territories and increase the federal matching rate from the current 55% level to 83%. This means that the local matching requirement would be lowered from 45% to 17%.

“This is potentially one of the most important pieces of federal legislation to specifically address the problems of the healthcare systems in the U.S. Territories,” Governor Mapp said. “I commend Senator Schumer for his leadership in working to ensure that all residents in the U.S. Territories are treated fairly and that the Territories are treated equitably with the States in all federal healthcare programs.”

The Schumer bill also would extend the Medicaid disproportionate share hospital (DSH) program — which provides direct payments to hospitals for providing care to uninsured individuals — to the Virgin Islands and the other territories for the first time. In addition to the increase in federal Medicaid payments, the Virgin Islands’ share of the new DSH payments would be approximately \$7 million annually to support V.I. hospitals directly. By eliminating the Medicaid cap, the Schumer bill also averts the Medicaid “fiscal cliff” in 2019, when the temporary increase in Medicaid funding for the territories under the Affordable Care Act expires.

Governor Mapp is sending a letter to Senator Schumer thanking him for his consideration and making himself available to work with the Senator, as he champions this important piece of legislation in the Senate. The governor will also work with Delegate Plaskett in the House to advance this important piece of legislation, according to the release.

Feature Image: Senator Charles "Chuck" Schumer.