

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Rules Committee Forwards Nominations Of Dr. Michelle Davis, Attorney Jomo Meade To Full Senate

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ST. CROIX -- The Committee on Rules and Judiciary on Thursday forwarded the nomination of Attorney Jomo Meade to serve as a judge in the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands in this district. Mr. Meade's nomination will for the first time in years bring the Superior Court in compliance with local law. It also approved the renomination of Judge Harold Willocks for a second six-year term at the Superior Court.

On Friday, the committee approved the nomination of Department of Health Commissioner Nominee Dr. Michelle Davis, who is on loan to the territory from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.

If approved by the full Senate, Attorney Meade's nomination will bring parity to the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands.

Virgin Islands Code § 71 mandates an equal distribution of judges between the St. Croix and St. Thomas-St. John divisions. Presently there are five judges who reside in the St. Thomas-St. John division and only four in St. Croix. The disparity between the two divisions have lasted for years as several governors have failed to submit a nomination for the fifth judgeship in St. Croix. This has caused a large number criminal cases to remain pending here while suspects sit in jail for multiple years, which has resulted in additional expenses to the Bureau of Corrections, as the cost of housing inmates in the territory currently stands at \$150 daily.

Dr. Davis made a few revelations at yesterday's hearing. She revealed that she had terminated some employees after suspecting corruption, and made known that while D.O.H. was working to fill many vacancies, some important positions --- including territorial immunization director, legal counsel, risk management director, child health director and a pediatrician, among other important positions - remained vacant, while others could not be filled because funding was not in place.

Dr. Davis, who revealed her salary to be \$150,000 annually, will serve as Health commissioner for two years as per an agreement with the federal government. But she said her agreement could be extended to as much as six years, and said she would be willing to stay and help turnaround the beleaguered department -- which has seen between 7-10 commissioners in the last ten years, according to multiple senators -- to help guide the facility to its full potential.

On the issue dismissing employees on the basis of suspected corruption, Senator Kenneth Gittens, chair of the committee, said while he was pleased to see the movement, he was somewhat disappointed that those persons hadn't been referred to the V.I.P.D. for followup action. The second-term Democrat said if no followup is implemented, as has happened in the past, employees could sue the government for wrongful discharge, which then forces an already financially wanting system to find monies to satisfy the months or years in which the fired employees stayed without work.

Dr. Davis also said that D.O.H. employees' morale remained low, but revealed plans on turning around that situation.

"The morale is currently low and the senior team, working in conjunction with the director, we are in the process of developing some activities to bring the morale up," she said. Dr. Davis also revealed that come June, she would be hosting all-staff meetings, which will take place in St. Croix in the morning, and in the afternoon in St. Thomas.

Dr. Davis' nomination was favored by senators Gittens, Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly, Novelle Francis, Jean Forde and Justin Harrigan, Sr. Senator Janette Millin Young abstained.

Feature Image: Dr. Michelle Davis, center, poses for a picture with her staff.

Image Credit: VI Legislature.

