

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Quick Note: Changes Made To Current Laws Increase Emergency Commitment For The Mentally Ill

Government / **Published On September 08, 2016 09:44 AM /**

Staff **September 08, 2016**



Senator Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly.

ST. CROIX -- Senators who make up the Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services gathered at the Fritz E. Lawaetz Legislative Hall here and forwarded two measures sponsored by Senator Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly, above, to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary.

The first measure, Bill No. 31-0366, increases the emergency commitment that someone suffering with mental illness, drug or intoxication dependence -- who is deemed an

immediate threat to themselves or others -- from a minimum of five to a maximum of 10 days. Currently, the commitment length is 48 hours to five days. Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly's original measure included a maximum of eight days.

The second measure, Bill No. 31-0367, amends the involuntary commitment law -- a legal process through which an individual who is deemed by a qualified agent to have symptoms of severe psychiatric disease is court-ordered into treatment in a mental institution -- from a total of five to a total of 30 days.

According to Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly, the bills are intended to give families with mentally ill individuals enough time to determine how they are going to access off-island help, as the territory has none.

Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly, telling a story of a family who had an 18-year-old that required longer commitment but was not able to find an off-island facility in the time required by law, said, "Oftentimes, 48 hours or even five days is not sufficient to determine if medication will work or even to determine what medications might work." She said the agency holding the young man decided to break the law and hold him longer instead of releasing him to his unprepared family.

The measures were approved without opposition.