

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Says Human Services Could Have Been More 'Sensitive' When Moving Sea View Patients

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ST. THOMAS -- In a press release issued late Sunday, Governor Kenneth Mapp, who met with the families of Sea View patients at the troubled facility here on Saturday to hear their concerns about the manner in which the move from Sea View to other facilities was being handled, as well as the government's plan for patient care moving forward, acknowledged that Department of Human Services Commissioner-Designee Anita Roberts [could have done a better job](#) in handling the delicate situation, apologizing to families and telling them that the relocation could have been handled with more sensitivity.

But the governor was adamant that the patients must leave Sea View, citing the facility's [decertification](#) by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (C.M.S.), and its multiple issues with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (H.U.D.), Office of Residential Care Facilities. (Among other deficiencies, Sea View defaulted on its H.U.D.-insured mortgage).

Mr. Mapp, whose own mother suffers from dementia and Alzheimer's, shared with the group his story of navigating the challenges he faces to meet the needs of his mother's ongoing care and recognized the strains that family members are met with when caring for an aging loved one and their reliance on facilities like Sea View when planning for long-term care.

Sea View Nursing Home has faced a financial crisis following the loss of C.M.S. payments, which has resulted in the facility not meeting the operating standards required to provide adequate patient care. Mr. Mapp has met with Sea View owner Dr. Alfred Heath to discuss potential options for the purchase and ownership of the facility by the Government of the Virgin Islands, according to the release.

The governor indicated that details of the acquisition have not been finalized. However, he outlined the initial plan for the professional management and consolidation of facilities now housing seniors in St. Thomas.

And he publicly thanked Dr. Heath for his many years of service: "I want to publicly express my thanks to Dr. Alfred Heath for his decades of commitment to this facility ... and for providing services to the people of the territory," Mr. Mapp said.

Last Monday, government vehicles representing various departments and agencies descended on the Sea View Nursing Home and began busing away the patients to other facilities, leaving some onlookers — one of whom contacted The Consortium and even provided pictures of the scene to the publication — concerned about what was taking place.

One day later, on Tuesday, Ms. Roberts held a press conference explaining that H.U.D. had given D.H.S. 24 hours to move patients out of the facility. It later turned out that her interpretation of the letter was wrong; H.U.D. was seeking a plan from the government within 24 hours, relative to its strategy in relocating the Sea View patients, and not demanding a move as Ms. Roberts had surmised.

The situation spiraled out of control, with families decrying the government's actions as inhumane, and Senator Tregenza Roach demanding that the [residents be returned to Sea View](#) until a plan of action could be put forward by the government.

The situation led to Saturday's meeting, where the governor promised a better way forward.

Lieutenant Governor Osbert Potter, Ms. Roberts, Cherie Munchez, the governor's communications director and other cabinet officials were present for the meeting.