

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Government Identifies Some Funds To Help J.F.L. Meet CMS Requirements, But Loan Will Be Needed To Complete Process

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ST. CROIX -- The Government of the Virgin Islands has identified funds that, once approved by the Senate, will be used to keep the Juan F. Luis Hospital on the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services program, according to Nellon Bowry, chairman of the Government Hospital and Health Facilities Corporation Board of Directors. Mr. Bowry assured hospital officials and board members during a meeting held at J.F.L. yesterday that the Mapp administration would do all in its power to get the hospital back into compliance.

At the meeting, hospital CEO Richard Evangelista attempted to allay fears that the medical facility would be booted from the Medicare and Medicaid Services program, telling board members that a 12-page letter of deficiency the hospital received from CMS was "narrow and focused."

Mr. Evangelista said CMS's 90-day notice of termination is routinely issued after surveys such as those conducted at J.F.L.

"There is no threat of immediate termination, and no suggestion for a Systems Improvement Agreement," Mr. Evangelista said. "Rather, CMS simply wants the hospital to provide a focused plan of correction to address the deficiencies noted."

CMS has given the hospital until today to come up with a plan of correction, after surveyors deemed the hospital out of compliance with CMS's standards of participation. In a 12-page report, CMS listed a myriad of deficiencies at the hospital, including old and wet ceiling tiles.



O.M.B. Director and Chairman of the

Territorial Hospital Board Nelon, Bowry. (Credit: Ernice Gilbert, VIC)

"There was potential for any patient or staff member to get injured from slips/falls, and injuries from falling materials, and exposure to/or acquiring fungal infections that enter the hospital from the front door, hemodialysis unit, emergency room, employee entrance, and patient hallways on all units," reads the report.

The federal agency said it would terminate its contract with the hospital by February 27, if it failed to comply.

Mr. Evangelista said the hospital needed funds to come into compliance, and while it was not stated how much would be needed, Governor Kenneth Mapp, in a letter addressed to Senate President Neville James last week, asked that funding for hospital repairs -- to include J.F.L. and the Roy Lester Schneider Hospital -- be increased from \$10 million to \$20 million, [in his \\$260 million capital projects measure](#).

Mr. Bowry, who also serves as director of Management and Budget, said yesterday that the Mapp administration was committed to helping the hospital stay in compliance with CMS requirements. He also revealed that a funding source that would begin the process of coming into compliance had been found, and that the money would be available immediately following Senate approval.

"The funds are there, they simply need to be re-purposed," he told The Consortium following meeting. The board had gone into executive session to discuss matters they deemed sensitive.

But Mr. Bowry said the funding that was identified would not be enough to complete the necessary work needed for J.F.L. to come into compliance. He said that the government would need to float bonds sometime next year to meet the need, and suggested the governor's capital projects measure as a possible path.

"There are two pieces to this because they need some funds to start the project in January, and we're going to get that from funds that already exist -- we already have the money," Mr. Bowry said. "But it needs to be re-purposed, and the governor is going to be talking to the 31st Legislature before its tenure ends.

"In that case, as soon as the Legislature acts on it, we will have the money the next day," Mr. Bowry added. "We need the money to show [CMS] that the project can start in January. But it doesn't take care of the balance of it, and we expect to get the remaining funds through the capital projects budget."

Mr. Bowry again stressed the Mapp administration's dedication to assuring the viability of the hospital, and said there was no doubt in his mind that they would be successful. Multiple board members lauded Mr. Evangelista and his staff for their dedication and swift action in preparing the plan of correction, which Mr. Evangelista said would be delivered to CMS, as requested, today.