The Virgin Islands Consortium

Note: St. Croix Senators Find $1 Million To Help J.F.L. Keep CMS Certification; Financial Services Regulation Measure Clears First Hurdle

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ST. THOMAS -- Senators who make up the Committee on Finance, chaired by outgoing Senator Clifford Graham, met at the Earl B. Ottley Legislative Hall on Wednesday as they sought to take immediate action on the problems at the Juan F. Luis Hospital, which was given notice by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid last month that J.F.L. had failed to adhere to C.M.S.'s standards for participation, following an inspection the federal agency's surveyors conducted.

CMS said it would end its current agreement with JFL by February 27 if the hospital does not comply.

The measure, Bill No. 31-0496, sponsored by Senators Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly, Kurt Vialet, Neville James, Kenneth Gittens and Sammuel Sanes, reallocates $1 million to J.F.L. for critical repairs with the hospital's heating, ventilation and cooling system, as cited by C.M.S. The funds will be taken from funding for the new Herbert Grigg Home for the Aged.

According to the measure, the hospital still needs some $13 million to adequately fund repairs to come into compliance with CMS standards. During a meeting held at the Juan F. Luis Hospital last week, territorial hospital board chairman Nellon Bowry, said at least some of the funds would have to be supplied through floating of bonds, and suggested Governor Kenneth Mapp's capital projects measure as a possible path.

Bill No. 31-0496 was favorably voted out of Finance and forwarded to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary, chaired by outgoing senator Kenneth Gittens.

Also forwarded to Rules and Judiciary, was Bill No. 31-0489, a measure that seeks to amend the territory's current International Banking Center Regulatory Act, by awarding licenses to more international financial services companies, all while assuring a stricter background check process.

The measure would remove authority to approve licenses for International Banking Entities (IBEs) under the purview of the director of Banking and Insurance, which currently operates through the Lieutenant Governor's Office, and place that authority under the control of the Virgin Islands Banking Board.

The original measure was enacted in 2012 as a way to create a respectable financial market in the territory, à la Puerto Rico, attracting them with tax breaks.