

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Territory Chosen To Participate In U.S. D.H.S. Substance Abuse And Mental Health Academy

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Lieutenant Governor Osbert Potter announced on Friday that the U.S. Virgin Islands will be joining up to 20 states to participate in the U.S. Department of Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Commercial Parity Policy Academy.

According to the release, the territory's participation in the Parity Academy will be a team effort with Dept. of Health Commissioner Michelle Davis and D.O.H.'s Division of Mental Health, which serves as the territory's State Mental Health Authority and Single State Agency for Substance Use. Mr. Potter discussed with Gwendolyn Hall Brady, director of the Division of Banking and Insurance, and Berlina Wallace Berube, D.O.H.'s director of

Mental Health, the importance of the territory's participation, the release further states.

"This is great for the Virgin Islands and for people in need of mental health and substance use disorder treatment," Mr. Potter said. "The Affordable Care Act (ACA) does not apply to any U.S. territory, which includes the U.S. Virgin Islands. The Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 (MHPAEA), is applicable to the U.S. Virgin Islands. MHPAEA is a federal law that generally prevents group health plans and health insurance companies that provide mental health or substance use disorder ("MH/SUD") benefits from being discriminatory in mental health and substance use disorder treatment, when compared to benefits offered for medical/surgical procedures," he added.

The release says MHPAEA was further amended by ACA and is now applicable not only to group health insurance but also to individual health insurance coverage. The U.S. Virgin Islands is seeking participation in the Commercial Parity Policy Academy ("CPPA") as a means of being included in any reform made to ACA, according to the release. The Policy Academy will provide technical assistance both prior to and after the one in-person meeting to be held in mid-April 2017 in Rockville, Maryland, which is scheduled to take place from February through August 2017. Most of the work on the enforcement of parity compliance will be done via teleconference.

For more information, contact the Office of the Lieutenant Governor, Division of Banking, Insurance and Financial Regulation on St. Thomas at 340-774-7166 or St. Croix at 340-773-6459. Additional information on this topic and other banking, insurance and financial regulation topics can be obtained online at [here](#).