

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Francis Asks Mapp To Reprogram \$3 Million Of \$6 Million Bitumen Tanks Funds For Anna's Hope Mental Facility Repairs

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ST. CROIX -- In response to a letter from Senator Novelle Francis, Governor Kenneth Mapp has agreed to identify funds for a mental health facility, according to a release issued by Mr. Francis's office. The senator wrote to the governor earlier this month requesting that a portion of the funds from Limetree Bay Terminals that were originally intended for the construction of bitumen storage tanks, be used to foster mental health care in the community.

In the letter, dated August 14, Mr. Francis said it was brought to his attention that \$6 million originally intended for the bitumen tanks was released to the government, as Limetree Bay has opted not to pursue the project. Bitumen is the liquid binder that holds asphalt together. Mr. Mapp on multiple occasions had spoken about the benefits of having such tanks in the territory, including lowering the cost of asphalt, which is used to resurface the territory's roads.

"I am urgently requesting your consideration of reprogramming \$3 million of these funds to be used for the rehabilitation of the Anna's Hope facility on St. Croix for future use as a mental health facility," wrote Mr. Francis.

The governor's declaration of a state of emergency regarding mental health, according to the second-term Democrat, speaks to the critical nature of the matter. He said the territory's mentally ill roam the streets, often at risk to themselves and residents of the community. They may also be in jail, which is similarly not suited to serve the population so the designation of a facility to both house and treat the mentally ill is long overdue, Mr. Francis said.

"While I am encouraged by the Department of Health's efforts to address the concerns of the mentally ill and their families, I believe that more needs to be done," Mr. Francis told the governor. "The reprogramming of funds intended for the bitumen plant presents a significant opportunity to make inroads in our collective plans for the treatment of the mentally ill across our territory."

In his response to the letter, Mr. Mapp said he has forwarded Mr. Francis's request concerning the \$3 million for a mental health facility to the Public Finance Authority (P.F.A.). He said he has tasked P.F.A. Executive Director Valdamier Collens with identifying any unused bond proceeds which may be re-programed for this purpose.

But whether Mr. Mapp agreed to allocate a portion of the \$6 million that was set aside for the bitumen plant was not clear. In a release issued [last week](#), Mr. Mapp identified the \$6 million for work at the Paul E. Joseph Stadium and other Frederiksted projects, part of a rehabilitation plan spearheaded by the governor.

Even so, Mr. Francis thanked the governor for what he said was Mr. Mapp's cooperation and commitment to achieving measurable gains in the territory's delivery of services to the mentally ill. The senator said he looks forward to an update of how and when the funds will be reprogrammed.