

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Medical Evacuees, About To Be Transferred Back To Care Of VI Government, Receive Extension From FEMA

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Medical evacuees from the U.S. Virgin Islands were to be placed back under the care of the Virgin Islands government on Friday, as a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) agreement to care for the patients -- covering lodging and medical expenses for these medical evacuees -- was set to expire today.

Senator Kurt Vialet, who raised the issue in a release published Wednesday, expressed alarm about the expiration while highlighting the lack of acute facilities in the territory. Mr. Vialet added that as of November 29, the "Western Shelters", also called modular units, had not been erected and that both hospitals were unable to provide care. "Hence, it is totally unacceptable that the process to provide temporary structures have not taken

place, but the transfer of patients by the feds is being withdrawn on November 30," reads Mr. Violet's release.

The modular units, which are projected to be utilized on the hospitals' grounds for 2-4 years, were to be installed in December, according to Governor Kenneth Mapp. Previously, the governor had said that the hospitals would be reconstructed from the ground up. However, following his trip to the nation's capital, Mr. Mapp said the Army Corps of Engineers would perform assessments to determine the best way forward.

"I am calling on the administration to immediately request that FEMA and CMS extend the transfer until temporary structures are erected to provide acute care," Mr. Violet said.

In a statement emailed to The Consortium late Wednesday, Dept. of Health Commissioner Michelle Davis said FEMA had granted an extension to medical evacuees who needed additional time in off-island facilities.

"I appreciate and thank Senator Violet for his concern regarding the healthcare for the Virgin Island's community. I have been actively working behind the scenes with our Federal partners and others to ensure the Virgin Island's community has access to essential healthcare services. As a result of a meeting held today between the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Juan F. Luis Hospital (JFL), Schneider Regional Medical Center (SRMC), Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA) and the Department of Health (DOH) an extension was granted for off-island medical services for individuals who may need it. I'm very pleased about the flexibility and support that FEMA has provided as we recover from Hurricanes Irma and Maria," Ms. Davis said.

Ms. Davis, criticized for the lack of communication between the department and medical evacuees, has since visited patients and their families in Puerto Rico twice, and plans to visit those in Atlanta, Georgia in December.

Correction: Nov. 30, 2017

A previous version of this story incorrectly stated that medical evacuees currently off-island would be affected by expiration of FEMA's agreement. Those who would be affected are medical evacuees who are needing to be airlifted out of the territory for care. The story has been updated to reflect the correct information.