

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Local Doctors, Stung By Criticism At Recent Hearing, To Hold Press Conference Wednesday

Health / **Published On February 26, 2018 09:47 PM /**

Staff **February 26, 2018**



ST. CROIX -- A group of local doctors have invited media houses to Gertrude's Restaurant on Wednesday at 11:00 a.m., to address what the invite says were comments made by Troy de Chabert-Schuster and Senator Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly during a Committee on Rules and Judiciary hearing [last week](#).

Both Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly and Mr. de Chabert-Schuster delivered stinging rebukes to the V.I. Medical Examiners Board -- currently made up of mostly doctors -- which oversees the licensing process of physicians looking to practice in the territory.

Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly's criticism came as part of a bill she introduced that would, among other changes, diminish the power of the V.I. Medical Examiners Board on deciding who should practice medicine in the territory.

The board currently requires applicants for a medical license to pass the Special Purpose Examination of the U.S. Federation of State Medical Boards (SPEX) exam — even if those applying have passed several medical board exams and have been practicing in other jurisdictions for years. Though the measure was ultimately held in committee for some important amendments, if it is approved and subsequently signed into law by Governor Kenneth Mapp, the bill could pave the way for an influx of new physicians in the territory, thereby possibly increasing competition and causing the cost of health care to drop, while offering Virgin Islanders with a variety options.

The bill seeks to eliminate the SPEX test for doctors who have already passed board exams. Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly said the local medical board has stymied attempts of physicians who wanted to practice in the territory, and as a result has placed Virgin Islanders at a disadvantage.

The main problem with the board is that it consists mostly of physicians already operating in the territory, as the past two governors have not dealt with the critical issue of appointing the adequate number of civilians to balance the board. Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly has asked the Department of Justice to investigate whether the board has colluded to keep other physicians out of the territory.

In a letter to the D.O.J., Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly wrote: "The board's actions demonstrate a concerted effort to exclude physicians from entering the Virgin Islands health market, constituting an anti-competitive and unfair method of competition, causing harm to residents of the territory."

Other senators agreed that the board has served as a hindrance. And Mr. de Chabert-Schuster told lawmakers he believed that connivance was afoot.

Stating that a great number of physicians practicing in the territory make over \$1 million a year, Mr. de Chabert-Schuster said, "The physicians here are really trying to limit the number of physicians and hold the health care of our citizens hostage."

"There is certainly a conspiracy to keep physicians out of the territory," Mr. de Chabert-Schuster said.

Dr. Frank Odum, who serves as the chairman of the medical board, said there were already plans to eliminate the SPEX exam, but Hurricanes Irma and Maria hindered progress. "The last time that I was before this body, we were given a directive to fix this problem, do away with the SPEX exam and allow reciprocity or it would be done for us through legislation. We could find nowhere in the VI code the need for the SPEX. It was an issue that could be corrected within rules and regulations and we committed to this body that it would be done at our very next meeting. Needless to say, Irma and Maria disrupted our scheduled September meeting," Dr. Odum said.

He asked that the board be allowed to remove the SPEX requirement, although why the board had not taken action before is a question that lingers.

The invite did not give the names of the physicians who will be attending the press conference.

© Viconsortium 2026