

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Seeks Support For VI Healthcare From U.S. Health And Human Services Secretary While In Washington

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Governor Kenneth Mapp and his team were back at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Thursday to continue months-long negotiations to advocate for U.S. Virgin Islands hospitals, which have been underfunded for decades because of historically unfair and unrealistic federal policies, Government House announced Friday.

Currently, the Roy L. Schneider Medical Center and the Governor Juan F. Luis Hospital are reimbursed under Medicare using outdated cost schedules from 1982 and 1996, respectively, resulting in each hospital being under-reimbursed by millions of dollars each

year, the governor said.

Some of the federal fee schedules for certain expensive procedures such as joint replacement and chemotherapy require major adjustment, according to the governor. For example, Medicare patients may require expensive chemotherapy drugs that can cost up to \$14,000 per treatment, but Medicare pays only a small fraction, leaving Virgin Islands hospitals to shoulder most of the costs. This has brought fiscal distress to the territory's hospitals, with the local government left to cover these costs.

In previous visits to Washington, Mr. Mapp convinced the Trump administration and Congress to temporarily waive the local match for disaster-related Medicaid funding through 2019 as part of the supplemental disaster bill passed in February. Now the governor has asked the new HHS Secretary Alex Azar and the head of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, Seema Verma, for further assistance with the territory's Medicaid system.

Mr. Mapp requested that HHS recommends that Congress provides the Virgin Islands an increased, state-like federal match rate for Medicaid funding and addresses the "fiscal cliff" by providing the territory with sufficient federal Medicaid funding in the future, according to Government House.

"HHS Secretary Azar and Administrator Verma were receptive to our reasonable requests to ensure proper healthcare funding for our poor and elderly," Mr. Mapp said. "As we rebuild state-of-the-art hospitals during our recovery, I want to make sure that our healthcare system becomes fiscally sound now and for future generations. I truly believe that Virgin Islanders are entitled to the same level of healthcare offered to Americans living across the continental United States. Our fiscal outlook and ability to offer expanded healthcare will greatly improve once we receive support comparable to what is provided to the 50 states."