

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Rivera-O'Reilly Making Final Push In Senate As Three Of Her Healthcare-Related Bills Receive Favorable Nods

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ST. THOMAS -- Senator Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly isn't spending her last few months as a senator relaxing. The well-researched lawmaker, who has occasionally been controversial, appears to be giving it her all in the closing months, with three of the senator's recent legislation receiving favorable nods from her colleagues and testifiers alike.

During a Wednesday hearing in the Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services, which Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly chairs, the three measures proposed by the

lawmaker -- [Bill No. 32-0197](#): to ensure the physical, mental, and behavioral needs of companion animals in shelters and other facilities; [Bill No. 32-0177](#): an Act amending the law relating to renewal of nursing licenses; and [Bill No. 32-0212](#): an Act amending the law to allow for the pronouncement of death by registered nurses, physician assistants and nurse practitioners -- were forwarded to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary with positive outlooks.

Testifying on Bill No. 32-0197 were Carlos Robles, commissioner of the Department of Agriculture; Randolph Knight, president of Lucky Paws Foundation, Dr. Bethany Bradford, director of Veterinary Services, Daniel Rodriguez, police detective at the V.I.P.D., and Donna Nemeth, director of operations at the Humane Society of St. Croix.

Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly said the measure seeks to establish a minimum standard under which animal centers and other facilities operate. She said the main objective is to ascertain that the animals are provided with the proper care in a humane manner.

Mr. Robles said the measure provides a careful balance of establishing a solid regulatory framework for operations and management without onerous and counterproductive restrictions. Mr. Knight of Lucky Paws Foundation said in order for the bill to be effective, there must be inspections and enforcement guidelines.

Ms. Bradford said the bill addresses another level of animal welfare and protection of public health that has been lacking in the Virgin Islands. She said there are two main issues in the bill that require additional comments: inspection and registration of facilities and animals, and enforcement of the provisions.

All other testifiers said they supported the intent of the legislation.

On Bill No. 32-0177, Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly said the measure was birthed following requests from the members of the VI Board of Nurse Licensure, who sought to alleviate what they said can become an overwhelming license-renewal process. According to the senator, the measure amends the current statute so that license renewals would take place during the birth month of the license holder.

It, too, was forwarded to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary after being amended to change the deadline to 75 days before the expiration date from October 15, and to strike the sentence that indicates the validity of the license as being from January 1 to December 31.

The last of the three measures heard on Wednesday was Bill No. 32-0212, which allows for attending physicians as well as registered nurses, physician assistants and nurse practitioners to pronounce the death of a hospice patient.

Attorney General Claude Walker supported the measure, stating that it's understandable that the traditional role of nurses and physician assistants should be expanded to include specific situations in which they may be able to pronounce death. For this reason, he said, the Department of Justice has concluded that the overall intent of the measure has merit.

Tracy Sanders, president of Continuum Healthcare Inc., said hospice services do not pronounce death. However, it will if the bill becomes law.

It was voted on favorably and forwarded to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary.

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