

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bill To Fund The Construction Of A Behavioral Health Facility On St. Croix Crosses First Hurdle

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A bill sponsored by Senator Novelle Francis seeking to improve the state of mental health in the territory was approved on Wednesday in the Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services, chaired by Senator Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly.

The measure, [Bill No. 32-0247](#), was first introduced over a year ago but had [some setbacks relative to funding](#). It seeks to appropriate \$3 million for the establishment of a behavioral health care facility on the island of St. Croix, while establishing requirements for the operation of inpatient and out-patient treatment programs at the behavioral health care facility.

It has been forwarded to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary, chaired by Mr. Francis, for further vetting.

Following the health facility bill's passage, Mr. Francis [took to his Facebook profile](#) to thank his colleagues for supporting the measure. He also hailed it as an important step in the right direction, and said an amendment would be added to include funding for mobile medical vans, which the senator said would be used in communities to assist individuals with mental illness through treatment and referrals.

"This bill would restore humanity and compassion to how we treat our mentally ill and their families. These families have walked a hard road without the resources that should be available. We are still far from reaching our goal, but we're closer than we were yesterday," the senator said.

The measure was deemed the most important amongst the five that were approved in the committee on Tuesday, Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly said.

"It is the first and most important step towards addressing mental illness in our community," Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly [wrote on her Facebook page](#). "The measure funds an outpatient intensive care treatment facility and an inpatient long and short term care component of no less than 25 beds... This measure is a result of the dedication and commitment of the sponsor. It is a fine example of what happens when your senators work together towards accomplishing common goals."

Four other bills were also approved during the hearing, including the following:

[Bill No. 32-0244](#): Sponsored by Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly, the measure seeks to expand optometrists to treat glaucoma in the Virgin Islands.

[Bill No. 32-0245](#): Sponsored By Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly, the bill seeks to exempt urgent care facilities from the requirement of getting a certificate of need and mandating that these entities must accept MAP, Medicare and uninsured patients.

[Bill No. 32-0173](#): Sponsored by Senators Janelle Sarauw, the measure is a resolution honoring and commending The Family Resource Center for its services to victims and families in the U. S. Virgin Islands throughout the years.

[Bill No. 32-0236](#): Sponsored by Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly, the bill seeks to amend Virgin Islands law as it relates to the practice of dental therapy in the territory.