

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Woman Lying On Cold Floor In Lobby Of JFL's ER A Side Effect Of Hospital's Mounting Problems, Violet Says

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ST. CROIX-- The long wait times at the emergency room at the Juan F. Luis Hospital is a result of the overall condition of the hospital, Senator Kurt Violet told the Consortium during an interview Sunday.

Mr. Violet's comments came after an outcry in the community on Sunday following the publishing of a video recorded by a resident and local recording artist, Tia, which shows what appears to be the silhouette of a person who had covered his or herself in a blanket and was lying on the cold floor of the emergency room's lobby, vomiting in a bag.

The rebuke of the local government for the state of St. Croix's only public medical facility was swift.

"This is absolutely heartbreaking. Shame shame shame on the VI government. You can and must do better. I'm not just a continental expressing my frustrations. I experienced extremely concerning health care at a local hospital this year while being treated for several life-threatening illnesses. I ended up flying myself to the mainland. Virgin Islanders deserve better," said Julie Symula on the Consortium's [Facebook platform](#).

Another individual said she lost her baby possibly as a result of the hospital's extremely long wait times. Her quote was slightly edited for clarity. "Had a miscarriage, was bleeding slightly and in pain. I was in the waiting room for 6 hours until the pain got worse and the bleeding became heavy. They had no beds and when I finally went off, all of a sudden they had a bed. I lost my baby," [she wrote](#).

But the crisis at the ER is a result of the manifold problems affecting the overall hospital. Mr. Violet said the issue at the ER is that boarders, persons who are abandoned in the hospital by their family members, have taken up about 10 rooms. JFL currently has about 21 rooms which are now housed in the Cardiac Center. Because the borders are occupying the beds, patients who would have normally been placed in one of the rooms are occupying the ER beds, creating a waiting crisis.

"There are ten boarders that nobody is being responsible for," Mr. Violet said. "Individuals who have been stabilized and are ready to be discharged, but there's no way to discharge them because their family has abandoned them. So you've gone from having the capacity of over 20 rooms to having the capacity to only 10 or 11 rooms because nobody is picking up these individuals. So every time you have people admitted to the hospital, these boarders take up the room, so they end up staying in the emergency room which now limits the amount of people that the emergency room could take, because at any given time, the emergency room has four, five, six people that are waiting."

Further exacerbating the problem, the hospital has no progressive care unit (PCU), nor does it have a medical-surgical (med-surg) arm because the hospital's second floor is no longer in use.

"You're severely reduced in the amount of beds the hospital has and with all the boarders that they have, it has severely reduced the hospital's ability to have that intake of patients into the hospital," Mr. Violet said.

The senator said he has been pushing hospital executives to open up the PCU on the second floor, but the new problem is the lack of registered nurses. "Staffing is an issue. A lot of staff left after the (2017 hurricanes) and you have capacity issues in reference to having sufficient nurses." He said an additional 20 beds would be added to the hospital if the PCU on the second floor were to be utilized.

As for the modular units to the north of the hospital, two years after the storms, "they are a shell," Mr. Violet said. Hospital officials are awaiting furniture, fixtures and equipment that were omitted by former CEO Wanda Reuben, he said. "We were trying to get the governor to see whether he could get it expedited. Former CEO Wanda Reuben, when she signed the contract, she omitted the furniture, fixtures and equipment."

"We're in a bad situation and even when the harden modular units open, if we're not able to attract sufficient nurses and sufficient doctors, it's like you still have what you have," he added.

Mr. Violet said the first step in remedying the situation at the ER is to remove the boarders. "That would mean Human Services would need to come in and get their investigative team to get in contact with those families, and get them out the hospital -- especially those who are receiving a Social Security check and the families are keeping the money," he said. "[Human Services] needs to go in and get them out."

Mr. Violet revealed that the hospital was cited by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) for the boarders. "It's a certification issue because CMS cited us for having borders because they are no longer receiving hospital care, it's like they're in an assisted living facility. Everyday that they're in the hospital is a citation for us, because they're saying the hospital is not an assisted living facility."

The senator said he was working on expanding beds at Herbert Grigg so that the boarders could be placed there, which, he noted, would make about 10 more beds available at the hospital and perhaps ease the crisis at the ER.

Another problem: With all the hospital beds now in the Cardiac Center, "all of the heart-related operations are now absent," Mr. Violet said.

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