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With 'JFL North' Still Not Completed, Hospital is in Financial Crisis and Could Struggle to Make Payroll Without Infusion of Cash

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JFL North, the temporary hospital on St. Croix that will serve patients until the new, FEMA-funded state-of-the-art hospital is built. By. ERNICE GILBERT FOR VI CONSORTIUM

Hurricanes Irma and Hurricane Maria struck the territory 40 months ago and St. Croix's temporary modular facility, called Juan F. Luis Hospital North (JFL North), still has not been completed, causing the STX hospital to lose money as residents need to go elsewhere for medical treatment. On Thursday, the Committee on Disaster Recovery & Infrastructure, chaired by Senator Janelle Sarauw, called forward representatives from JFL for clarity on what is preventing the completion of the project. In October, hospital officials said JFL North [would come online the](#)

[following month](#), but it never did.

Chairman of JFL's Territorial Hospital Redevelopment Team, Christopher Finch, sought to defend hospital leadership. "Few actually understand the magnitude of the task that has faced JFL since the Irma and Maria hurricanes," Mr. Finch said. "JFL leadership and staff had to manage a hospital in a compromised facility with constant ongoing maintenance and repair needs; build a temporary structure that must meet all regulatory standards and function for several years and design and build a new hospital to take care of us in the future. All this had to be accomplished in this Covid-19 environment; a lot of credit goes to Ms. Williams and her leadership staff."

When asked what her top three challenges of the project were, JFL Interim Chief Executive Dyma Williams, said, "Money, money and the last one would probably be money because it's actually connected to every facet of everything we need to accomplish here."

She added, "A significant financial gap continues to remain as a direct result of the ongoing challenges from the loss of the third floor equivalent to approximately 50 percent of our inpatient capacity. In conjunction with the Covid-19 pandemic, JFL is in a cash crisis, and without further assistance JFL will not be able to meet our obligations, including payroll in the future."

JFL Acting Chief Financial Officer, Shenel Moorehead, stated, "At the end of the day our expenses are exceeding our revenues. We are not able to make the revenues we need to sustain based on the fact that we are at half capacity in terms of our inpatient units." She said off-island patient transfers resulting from the closure of the Cardiac Center was also affecting the hospital's bottomline. Ms. Moorehead also stated that JFL would need just under \$10 million to make it through the end of 2021.

Senate President Donna Frett- Gregory asked Ms. Moorehead about the status of outstanding debt from patients as a point of information, as there was no mention of it in JFL's presentation. Ms. Moorehead responded by stating that at the end of January, JFL had over \$33.4 million in outstanding debt.

The path to increasing revenue is by getting JFL North open, Ms. Moorehead said. "The Cardiac Center being open would allow us to reinvigorate that line of service and be able to treat that population that requires those services here on St. Croix," she said. JFL North would also increase bed capacity to nearly 100 from 48, which would also boost revenue.

"In some cases, on many days we are at full capacity, sometimes we do have to transfer patients just because of the mere fact that we have no more space in the hospital," Ms. Moorehead said. JFL North would also bring online four operating rooms, which she estimated could generate \$4 million per month, as each operating room could bring \$1 million a month.

Ms. Williams said because the hospital cannot meet certain needs, many families are separated from their loved ones as they have to be flown off-island for care. "No one wants to be separated from their loved ones when they are most vulnerable," she said, expressing regret. The interim CEO suggested that if everything goes well with the timeline, JFL North could be running by the end of June.

There was frustration in the Senate chamber regarding what has turned into a lengthy process to get JFL North up and running. Senator Kurt Vialet, chairman of the powerful Finance Committee, said, "This is 2021, the hurricane hit September of 2017. We had a hurricane in 1989, Hurricane Hugo that devastated St. Croix. We had a modular unit before 1991. I know that for sure because my daughter was born in the modular unit. So it took less than two years back in the eighties to

put up a modular unit, and now in a time period where we are more advanced in technology, etc, it's four years. We are still making mistakes, we need to move this, we need to do this. The reality is June isn't looking good and June is not going to be a reality unless FEMA jumps on board."

Senator Dwayne Degraff said, "I sat here from the 32nd Legislature, to be now in the 34th, and to hear the tragedies that I'm listening to in regards to a hospital, a source of health care for the people of the territory, is very disheartening."

Mr. Degraff added, "To CEO Williams and your team, thank you for all you do for the people of the territory and St. Croix."

Committee Chair Janelle Sarauw also extended compliments to Ms. Williams and talked about the constant change of leadership at JFL. "I don't really go out on a limb for people but I've noticed the tremendous work of the JFL team and we can't downplay what happened at JFL," she said. "Within the last 11 years they have had six interim or acting CEOs and Ms. Williams happens to be the third CEO on the JFL North Project. I am begging the board, there must be a level of continuity. At some point people have to stop acting and being the interim and make a decision. I know we are searching for a CEO but you have someone before you, you have people working now, provide them the support."

"Ms. Williams and her team are running a hospital and building a modular, that's insanity," Ms. Sarauw added.

JFL North will have approximately \$29.8 million in brand new equipment and resources "that will best serve the healthcare needs of our community," said Ms. Williams. Work is still ongoing at the 55,000 square-foot facility, with Ms. Williams stating that critical water and sewer lines were being connected.

"The intent of the previous JFL leadership was to complete the building using temporary hook ups to the current JFL, however, this temporary solution would not offer long-term stability critical to the support of JFL North," she said.