

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services Forwards 4 Bills

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Four bills passed from the Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services to the Rules and Judiciary on Tuesday discussing pressing issues in the healthcare community such as allowing for new podiatry licenses to be passed in the absence of a board and the Virgin Islands being part of establishing a Nurse Licensure Compact to create a multistate nursing license and the pronouncement of death registered nurses and certified registered nurse practitioners employed by a certified home health agency, hospice, or nursing home.

Bill 34-0042 is an act repealing title 3 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 23, section 415 relating to the Boards of Examiners for Medicine, Surgery, Dentistry, Pharmacy, Nursing, Optometry, Physical Therapy, Chiropractic and Podiatry and reestablishing the respective boards establishment of and re establishing the language in Title 27 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 1, section 1.a. and establishing a temporary board.

Dr. Regina Flippin, a podiatrist was not not pleased with this amending the part of the bill as she felt that it wouldn't allow for podiatrist to have a fair share of oversight in their professions. She felt that it would be in the best interest of the community to have podiatrists in charge of overseeing podiatrists.

There is a shortage of podiatrists in the territories and Ms. Flippin said that she spoke with eight podiatrists in the last 24 members, that would have their applications for licenses in a timely fashion, if there was a board in place to hear their applications for licenses. The Board of Podiatrists has been vacant since 2012.

The discussion shifted to a compromise of creating the temporary board for 120 days to issue licenses to podiatrists to have more podiatrist in the territory and then reassess and potentially change the composition of the Podiatry board in the future.

This bill will be replaced by a substitute bill before it to only address the Board of Podiatry as the Organic Act will only let one board be discussed in one bill. This will also allow them to add parts of the discussion to create a stronger bill such as the comprise of the temporary board to issue the license in the near future.

Bill 34-0028 is an act amending title 19 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 37, subchapter III adding section 870 to authorized registered nurses and certified registered nurse practitioners employed by a certified home health agency, hospice, or nursing home to determine and pronounce death under certain specified conditions; and requiring the Department of Health to promulgate implementing regulations.

Tracy Sanders, President of Continuum Care VI, explained the current process and the problem with it "Right now we do not pronounce, right now with the policy that we have someone from E.M.S comes out to the home, they will run a strip and verify no pulse, no respiration, we accompany that with the death certificate to the physicians, we do notify the physician at the time of passing. Just to be clear we do not pronounce that's something that we would want to do." and the main concern that the bill would address is

that they would not use V.I.P.D and E.M.S. when they already have a hospice nurse trained to pronounce death.

Later on in the hearing she explained that the change of the procedure would eliminate both of this agencies from the process of death when it comes to hospice care.

This bill passed with amendments that add the word certified to what facilities can pronounce death and also have the nurses provide how they came to that conclusion.

Bill 34-0040 is an act An Act amending title 27, chapter 1 of the Virgin Islands Code by adding a new subchapter Va. establishing the Nurse Licensure Compact to create a multistate nursing license.

This would allow the Virgin Islands to accept nurses from states that are also involved in the Nurse Licensure Compact in a quicker manner than the current situation without having to get re-licensed, making the Virgin Islands jobs more attractive to qualified professionals that want to work in the Virgin Islands. While attracting new people to move to the territory this bill could additionally help attract Virgin Islanders working as nurses in the mainland U.S. to move back home. Most of the Senators felt that if this passes it could help address the nurse shortage in the territory if it successfully passes.

34 states enacted and Guam have already enacted the Nurse Licensure Compact with several other states having legislation pending. Currently there are 2 Million nurses that are registered in states and territories that have enacted this legislation.

Bill 34-0041 an act amending title 27 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 1, subchapter I: by amending section 7 relating to the continuing medical education requirements for permanent and institutional licensees, by inserting a new section 55 relating to the Commissioner of Health's authorization to issue licenses to radiological technologists, a new section 56 relating to the Good Samaritan Law, and a new section 57 relating to penalties amending subchapter XI relating to the practice of podiatry; and by making technical amendments.