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With Pafford Medical Services Contract Almost the Same as Dept. of Health's Annual Budget, Violet Calls for Renegotiation

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Pafford Air One emergency helicopter service. By. PAFFORD MEDICAL SERVICES

Senator Kurt Violet during a Wednesday Committee on Finance hearing sought a renegotiation of the V.I. Dept. of Health's \$26.4 million annual contract with Pafford Medical Services.

The question was posed to Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion during the health department's budget hearing, whose Fiscal Year 2022 General Fund budget recommendation totals \$28,663,976, a decrease of a \$4,393,408 from 2021.

Pafford Medical Services has been providing emergency services in response to the Covid-19 pandemic in the territory and has provided personnel, ambulances, equipment and supplies to the Virgin Islands. Additionally, Pafford provided assistance after Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

Mr. Vialet encouraged D.O.H. to renegotiate the contract, which is \$26.4 million annually, because it is almost equivalent to D.O.H.'s full budget proposal. "That's really, really high compared to you having 400 plus employees and so much other areas that you must cover... What we are paying them is literally almost the same as your budget," the senator said.

Ms. Encarnacion said she "whole-heartedly" agreed with Mr. Vialet, and added, "There is always a way to renegotiate, so I am always for renegotiating." She said Pafford is being paid with federal funds, not the general fund budget, however "it's still being paid for."

"[I'm] just putting the word out there to Pafford owners that I think they need to revisit the present negotiations, the present contract. I think that they are getting quite a bit and we should be provided a better rate. They have been down here for more than a year," Mr. Vialet said. He said though he was thankful for Pafford services, it was "time to renegotiate."

Ms. Encarnacion shared that while Pafford brings some of its staff from off island, the company hires local individuals as well.

Earlier in the hearing, Senator Novelle Francis sought to learn how the Department of Health ensures it is getting a "return on investment" from Pafford. The commissioner explained that D.O.H. monitors staffing schedules, staffing listing, hospital, health and human services. "If we see trends occurring I bump it up to the chief operating officer, chief executive of Pafford and hold them accountable," Ms. Encarnacion said.

According to a description on its website, "Pafford Medical Services offers all forms of pre and post hospital healthcare, ranging from basic life support response to critical care ground and air response." The company said it is home to "over 900 full and part-time employees that staff more than 120 ambulances, three helicopters, three fixed wing aircraft, two state of the art communications centers, and one billing center across a four state region."