

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Concerns Expressed as Some DHS Employees Caring for Territory's Seniors are Unvaccinated

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A letter addressed to senators by a healthcare professional regarding Dept. of Human Services employees who are unvaccinated yet tasked with providing care to seniors, led to a discussion regarding the issue during D.H.S.'s budget hearing Monday.

D.H.S. Commissioner Kimberly Causey-Gomez said she shared those concerns.

The letter was addressed to Sens. Kurt Vialet and Novelle Francis.

Mr. Vialet explained that the healthcare professional does not want to be responsible for carrying the Delta variant of Covid-19 into the homes of the elderly population. "We have

individuals who work at Queen Louise, work at Herbert Grigg, Home Care, etc. and choose not to be vaccinated. How can we ensure that those individuals are not going to be a carrier when they go into the home?"

Ms. Cause-Gomez said she couldn't guarantee that unvaccinated employees wouldn't come in contact with the elderly population. "I can only hope that they use their PPEs and do everything" to protect against contracting or spreading the virus, she said.

Mr. Vialet said he was "seriously concerned" because while there may be freedom of choice, the elderly population is particularly susceptible to the virus, and with the Delta variant rampant, one's freedom of choice could lead to another person's demise.

"As we move on it's a difficult decision for the Virgin Islands in terms of how we are going to take care of our elderly population," Mr. Vialet said. He highlighted the issue at D.H.S. as the reason he doesn't want to place his 92-year-old father in the care of others. The senator demands that anyone who is taking care of his dad be vaccinated.

Ms. Causey-Gomez agreed and said, "There are some states that if you are a frontline worker you are mandated to get vaccinated."

It was not discussed whether D.H.S. would implement a vaccination mandate for its employees who interact with the elderly population. Such decisions would have to be approved by Governor Albert Bryan.

Mr. Vialet said the conversation was for everyone in the community "to have a serious reflection in terms of our elderly population," and he pointed to [the situation in the BVI](#) where twenty-five individuals have died as of result of Covid-19, twenty-four of which occurred in the past month.

"There are only two ways to get herd immunity: vaccinations or you get [Covid]. And if you get Covid now with the Delta variant, many individuals are dying from that or are getting seriously ill," Mr. Vialet said.

According to the post-budget analysis, the governor has recommended a General Fund appropriation of \$75,085,610 for Fiscal Year 2022" for the Department of Human Services.