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Plaskett Succeeds in Securing Additional \$252 Million in Medicaid Funding for USVI in Congress's \$1.4 Trillion Spending Bill

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The U.S. House of Representatives on Tuesday advanced a \$1.4 trillion fiscal year 2020 spending bill that is expected to clear the Senate and be signed into law by President Trump. The bill includes \$738 billion in funding for the military and \$632 billion for non-defense departments.

In the bill are some key gains for the U.S. Virgin Islands negotiated by Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett. Among the more prominent gains are increased Medicaid funding along with an increase in the federal Medicaid match for the territory that represents the highest percentage that any state on the mainland U.S. can secure.

“The domestic priorities and international assistance appropriations minibuss, H.R. 1865, reflects agreement on extending funding for health programs in addition to eight appropriations bills. This agreement comes after months of discussion between our office and House and Senate Members on the need to resolve the Medicaid Cliff by the end of the year, including increased funding for the territories and a greater percentage of funding from the federal government,” said Ms. Plaskett in a statement issued Tuesday.

The language negotiated by Ms. Plaskett that passed the House measure includes the following:

- \$252 million in additional Medicaid funding to the Virgin Islands over two fiscal years (\$126 million in each of fiscal years 2020 and 2021);
- Increases the rate of federal matching funds for Medicaid in the Virgin Islands from 55% to 83% for the remainder of fiscal 2020 and all of fiscal year 2021. 83% is the highest rate of federal match that any U.S. state may receive.

The following Plaskett-sponsored amendments were also included in the final package:

- An amendment to prohibit the Department of Justice from using funds to prevent the Virgin Islands from implementing its medical marijuana law;
- An amendment to provide \$5 million in funding for micro-grants to improve the quality and quantity of locally grown food in U.S. territories;
- Amendments to make the Virgin Islands and other U.S. territories eligible for funding reserved for areas of persistent poverty. This includes funding reserved under programs for rural development loans and grants, economic development grants, and assistance funded by the Community Development Financial Institutions Fund;
- An amendment that repeals statutory caps on Federal Aid Highway Emergency Relief Program aid to U.S. territories.

The Government of the Virgin Islands has waged a seemingly unending campaign to secure a Medicaid match from the federal government that mainland states have long enjoyed. During a visit to Congress [late February](#), Governor Albert Bryan asked lawmakers during his testimony in the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, to extend the 100 percent match for Medicaid, which was awarded under the Mapp administration and was set to expire on September 30. The deadline was [extended on Sept. 19](#).

“The territory’s severe disaster-related revenue losses are projected to extend well beyond that date—for at least another two years. Consequently, the Virgin Islands simply cannot afford to meet local match requirements for Medicaid (generally 45 percent) after September 30, 2019,” Mr. Bryan said. “We urge Congress to extend the disaster-related Medicaid relief in the Bipartisan Budget Act —the local match waiver and the additional Medicaid allotment of 100 percent federal funding—by one year and thereby allow the USVI’s Medicaid program to continue to operate through the end of FY 2020. I would also like to bring to your attention that our citizens have only one hospital that they can access for healthcare on each island.”

Ms. Plaskett said the minibuss bill also includes "historic investments in Head Start and child care programs, record funding for lifesaving medical research at the National Institutes of Health, and rejects the administrations misguided cuts to schools, health care, infrastructure, environmental

protection and clean energy programs."

She added, "We have outlined areas where funding has increased and we are happy that we have not lost any of our vital funding in this package."

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