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Bryan Expresses Support For Nurses Following Recent Protests, Says Payments Are Coming

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Nurses protested in downtown Christiansted, St. Croix on May 12, 2022. By. REEMY-REEMZ PHOTOGRAPHY/VICONSORTIUM

Governor Albert Bryan on Tuesday sought to place on record his administration's position regarding the territory's nurses, following protests that highlighted the plights of healthcare workers in the territory.

[On May 12](#), a large group of nurses supported by concerned residents and a number of lawmakers and political candidates, protested from the Basin Triangle all the way to Government House in Christiansted, an effort that was aimed at bringing attention to what the nurses have said are poor working conditions and equipment that lack maintenance, among other issues.

The nurses also spoke up against what they believe is an unfair situation where traveling nurses make as much as four times more than their local counterparts, even as local nurses are oftentimes training those traveling nurses to come up to speed locally.

During his weekly press briefing, Mr. Bryan said progress was being made relative to a financial incentive program for nurses. His comments were followed by those of Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion, who said a negotiating conversation had started with nurses that is separate from the incentive program led by Government House.

"We started last Friday and will continue to do that. That is separate from the incentive program I know that you are implementing, so that is actually great news for the nurses," she said.

Mr. Bryan sought to dispel any notion that he's against nurses. "It is nurses' month and for some reason there is a feeling that I don't like the nurses," the governor said. "You know we have set aside \$10 million in each hospital to compensate nurses. Everything takes a little while to get off the ground because we do have union contracts in place."

Governor Bryan, who said union negotiations were stalled due to the Covid-19 pandemic, explained that it's against the law for any administration to award money to government employees without the relevant negotiation. "We have done it in the past, and we are trying to do it the right way. So nurses, we appreciate you just like all the other grocery workers and the bank tellers and everybody else we have [lined up for Premium Pay](#). That money is coming, it's just that we have so many things at one time," he said.

He added, "We are trying to bring that money as fast as possible. They are going to get a nice chunk as we show our appreciation because we know that the nurses here are severely underpaid compared to their counterparts on the mainland."