

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Territory's Hospitals to Use \$20 Million Donation to Strengthen Staffing and Operations

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Bryan presents \$10 million checks to Schneider Regional Medical Center CEO Tina Comissiong (upper right), and Juan F. Luis Hospital CEO Douglas Koch. By. GOVERNMENT HOUSE

Nurses and other staff at the Juan F. Luis Hospital and the Schneider Regional Medical Center will benefit from a \$20 million dollar donation allocated to the facilities by Albert Bryan, governor of the U.S Virgin Islands.

The donation is part of \$540 million allocated to the territory when President Joe Biden signed a coronavirus-aid relief package, known as the American Rescue Plan Act, or

ARPA, into law in March 2021.

In keeping with that plan, on Monday, the executives at these hospitals were presented with checks of \$10 million each by Governor Albert Bryan to assist the institutions with retaining staff and hiring personnel to improve service. The money can also be used for maintenance and upgrades as well.

Schneider Hospital CEO Tina Comissionong said some of the funds will be used to attract clinical professionals to the hospital, pointing to a "staffing crisis" in healthcare affecting many jurisdictions.

"We very much look forward to using this money in the best interest of the people to be able to recognize and reward and retain our hard-working staff, recruit much-needed personnel and continue to advance out information technology projects," she said.

"We have an aggressive recruitment and retention plan that we've put together where we're hoping to bring back talented Virgin Islanders and even other talented clinical professionals to come and join our team," Ms. Commisong shared.

JFL CEO Douglas Koch on the other hand said a portion of the donation will be used to reward employees who have been working tirelessly throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

He said the money would go a long way in helping to secure the hospital's workforce into the future. "We have many challenges at Juan F. Luis Hospital, recruitment and retention of our employees being at the top of the list. We also have many infrastructures needs that need to be done at our hospital. This \$10 million will go a long way in making those improvements happen," he said.

"Our employees have done an amazing job dealing with Covid for the last three years now. Our goal is to utilize a portion of this money to reward and help retain them going forward while we are also in the process of recruiting new individuals to our hospital in St Croix," Mr. Koch added.

Earlier in July, officials at the JFL were told by senators on the Committee on Finance that they needed to engage in [an "aggressive recruitment" campaign](#) to fill dozens of jobs that were left vacant during the peak of the pandemic. Chairman of the Committee, Senator Kurt Violet also voiced his disappointment with the small monetary allocations that were being given to public hospitals, particularly Schneider, to operate.

But yesterday, Governor Bryan said the donation, along with millions of dollars that had been invested in both hospitals over the past two years, would go a long way in responding to some of the healthcare needs in the territory.

"This is not the end of the giving but a beginning of the giving to create an environment where we can attract medical professionals that can help to treat us and give people the healthcare they deserve," he remarked.

Meanwhile, the governor who had supported the mandate for medical staff to become vaccinated or face termination, shared that he has been in discussion with the Territorial Hospital Board, requesting that they relieve their vaccine mandates to allow nurses who are unvaccinated and require testing to return to work.

The mandatory vaccine policy was established by the Territorial Hospital Board on August 6, 2021 and required medical staff to be vaccinated against Covid-19 by September, 24 or face termination.

On Monday, the governor said that until the mandates are lifted, the government has taken up the financial responsibility for vaccine testing for nurses at both hospitals – a responsibility which once belonged to the unions.

"Until that is changed by the board, I have directed the CEOs not to charge personnel for the vaccine testing for those nurses who are already on board," he said.

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