

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bill Forming Regulatory Board for Use of Natural Medicines in USVI Heads to Full Senate

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Elesha George **August 26, 2022**



A bill to form a legal board to regulate the safe use of natural medicines and the methods used to practice naturopathy in the U.S. Virgin Islands has been forwarded to the full body by senators on the Committee on Rules and Judiciary.

Once active, the Naturopathic Board will have the authority to approve licenses and regulate additional naturopathic doctors wanting to practice in the territory. Naturopaths have been granted conditional clearance until that board is appointed.

Health practitioners who appeared before the committee on Thursday supported the bill, but noted that they were not included in discussions to create them, although it directly

affects their line of work.

"I look forward to having more in-depth conversations with the stakeholders when it comes to naturopathic medicine because what was done here, we were never consulted on," said Naturopathic Physician, Dr. Wendy Coram-Violet.

"I hope that moving forward, when the community or organizations are making decisions about our profession, that we are included in the conversation because we were not and I think if we did, we would have had a different outcome here," she told lawmakers.

Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion agreed, noting that while the bill went before the Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services, neither the Department of Health, the Board of Medical Examiners or the Board of Pharmacy, were asked to provide feedback at that point. "I think it would have been helpful for us to have been part of that discussion," she remarked.

"I am excited to see our board expand, I think we know that today, acknowledging that we don't have NDs on the island to form an appropriate board but I hope to see that in the future," added Naturopathic Doctor Chelsea Leander, while D.O.H. Medical Director and Territorial Infectious Disease Specialist, Dr. Tai Hunte-Cesar concurred with her colleagues.

During the hearing Ms. Encarnacion shared her concerns with some of the amendments, including a requirement to have a minimum number of people present at board meetings to approve license for doctors. Her position is that there simply aren't enough NDs on island to currently have a mandated number of physicians to form the proposed quorum needed to license more naturopaths.

"I want to make sure that if we really want to have naturopath come to the territory that we have options," she said. "So let's not hold ourselves to a board that may not have quorums. If you do not have the quorums then you cannot continue with the licensure process."

Ms. Encarnacion also recommended against exempting a pharmacist from serving on the board while noting that the term "a physician practicing integrative medicine" needed to be defined in the bill.

"We recommend that a physician practicing integrative medicine be defined and further clarification be given on how the assessment of the training and experience of the community member versed in herbal and natural remedies is determined," the commissioner said.

The current national standard is for boards to include a public/consumer member, with no personal stake, to ensure the public's position is considered.

"In this post-Covid-19 era, there is an increased desire to utilize and integrate naturopathic remedies with traditional western medicine thus, the VI Board of Pharmacy should maintain representation on the Board," Ms. Encarnacion added.

"I think having a pharmacist — because we do have a formulary and we do have prescriptive rights — on the board will be a plus," added Dr. Coram-Violet.

She also felt that the definition of Naturopathic Medicine did not need to be changed, as it would further complicate the bill by requiring it to define a person who practices integrative medicine – a requirement for some board members.

According to the doctor, the public member proposed to serve on the board should also not need to be experienced in traditional medicine. “They don’t necessarily have to be versed in herbal medicine or natural therapy and the like. It’s just a community member because they can certainly bring different perspective to the board.”

Naturopathic medicine combines natural healing agents with scientific research to create an alternative form of medical treatment.

The amendment expands and clarifies the definition of naturopathic medicine and the physical modalities used in the practice of naturopathy to include electrotherapy, diathermy, hydrotherapy, naturopathic manipulative therapy, and acupuncture.