

The Virgin Islands Consortium

\$700,000 Lifeline Given to Caribbean Kidney Center as Senate Passes Bill 35-0106

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A dialysis machine. By. GETTY IMAGES

In a swift response to a healthcare crisis, the 35th Legislature passed Bill 35-0106 when it convened in regular session on Wednesday. The rescue package for the Caribbean Kidney Center is worth \$700,000 and aims to prevent the imminent closure of the critical health institution and ensure uninterrupted dialysis services for local patients. Representatives from the Center had informed lawmakers of the facility's [imminent financial collapse](#) when they testified before the Senate Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services last week.

The funding comes from the general fund of the Virgin Islands and is earmarked for hiring essential staff, such as dialysis nurses, vital to maintaining operations at the beleaguered center.

Despite initial reservations, lawmakers overwhelmingly supported the bill. Senator Alma Francis Heyliger voiced her concerns about allocating funds to a private business but acknowledged the necessity of the measure. "We need to assist a business handling a territory's needs, especially one that provides vital dialysis services," she said. Heyliger also proposed an amendment, promising to protect the public's investment by mandating a return of the \$700,000 if the Center is sold to another entity.

Senator Franklin Johnson echoed his support for the bill and the proposed amendment, stressing the importance of not leaving dialysis patients "in the dark." This sentiment was also shared by Senator Samuel Carrion, who agreed that the measure was critical for the welfare of these patients.

Praising the measure, Senator Javan James urged his colleagues to continue promoting healthier lifestyles in the U.S. Virgin Islands. "As we fund these things, we need to also encourage people to live healthier," he remarked.

The proposed amendments to the bill also drew support from Senator Angel Bolques, who commended the collaborative efforts of all members in pushing the bill forward. Senator Donna Frett-Gregory applauded these efforts as well, saying, "As legislators, we have to be mindful and cautious about providing funding to for-profit agencies."

Senator Milton Potter stressed the gravity of the situation, labeling it a "crisis." He further emphasized the need for a long-term solution to dialysis treatment in the territory, saying, "This is really a short-term bridge."

"I would have been damned if I sat back and not come up with a solution today," said Senator Kenneth Gittens, the bill's sponsor, as he thanked his colleagues in advance for their support. "Whether or not this is a for-profit business, we have a life-and-death situation before us," he said.

In her remarks, Senator Carla Joseph also stressed the importance of the bill, reminding the chamber that the Caribbean Kidney Center is the only dialysis center in the area and serves many patients.

Senate President Novelle Francis emphasized the critical role of the Department of Health in managing the funding and urged the department to start tracking dialysis and renal failure cases in the community. He also stressed that public education on preventative measures is crucial in tackling the crisis.

When it came time to vote on the measure, Gittens offered the amendment that would provide the money to the Department of Health, which would then remit the funds to the Caribbean Kidney Centre upon the approval of the Office of Management and Budget.