



**THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
GOVERNMENT HOUSE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 19, 2019

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**Governor Bryan, Department of Human Services
Say “Medical Cliff” Will Be Averted Before Christmas**

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS—Governor Albert Bryan Jr. and the Virgin Islands Department of Human Services announced that the infamous “Medicaid Cliff” (running out of Medicaid money when the current federal funding was to expire at the end of this year) has been averted.

The U.S. House of Representatives passed a proposed budget agreement that contains a funding provision for the Territory in it. All indications are that Senate will pass the budget bill and be signed by President Trump before Friday.

“This agreement, when signed by the president, will protect health coverage for thousands of Virgin Islands residents, and also allow the Government of the Virgin Islands to better provide adequate resources to the territory’s healthcare facilities,” Governor Bryan said.

The bill (Section 202 of H.R 1865) contains a two-year agreement (Fiscal Years 2020 and 2021) to provide additional Medicaid funding for the Territories.

When passed, it is estimated that the USVI will receive approximately \$126 million for FY 2020 and another \$126 million in FY 2021 to cover the budget shortfall (fiscal cliff).

The federal matching fund rate for Medicaid in the USVI will go up from 55 percent to 83 percent with the Government of the Virgin Islands providing the remaining 17 percent.

“We have worked tirelessly to lobby Congress and the White House on this issue, and I want to thank Senators Mike Crapo, Joe Manchin and Lisa Murkowski for their unwavering support in the U.S. Senate, as well as delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett for her efforts in the House of Representatives,” Governor Bryan said. “We will continue to work together to ensure a permanent end to the disparity in Medicaid funding to the U.S. Virgin Islands and other insular territories.” Governor Bryan added.

Department of Human Services Commissioner Kimberley Causey-Gomez, expressed her relief and appreciation for her team, who have been working tirelessly to avoid a loss in funding that would have had a catastrophic impact on 30,000-plus residents of the Territory who rely on Medicaid for their health coverage.

Medicaid is a federal, state and territory program that provides health coverage to individuals with low incomes, children, pregnant women, elderly adults and people with disabilities.

According to Commissioner Causey-Gomez this important bill’s passage means:

- Increased access to more eligible people now can be enrolled
- Continued access to prescription drug benefits
- Dental benefits
- Behavioral health benefits
- Coverage of Medicare Part B premiums (for those eligible for Medicaid and Medicare)
- Access to more doctors
- Off-island transport for people needing services unavailable in the Territory
- Less pressure on the local VI Medicaid budget

“Every day, the DHS team is charged with finding ways to make a positive difference in the overall wellness and health outcomes of Virgin Islanders,”

Commissioner Causey-Gomez said. “That is why our team continually advocates for services and the funding to provide critical services to those most in need.”

The Commissioner thanked Governor Bryan for his persistent advocacy in Washington, D.C., during the last several months. The Governor also was a signatory to the joint letter sent to members of Congress from all of the Governors of the U.S. Territories: the U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands.

Commissioner Causey-Gomez also thanked Delegate Stacey Plaskett for her support in the U.S. House of Representatives and the other members of Congress who worked on making the bipartisan agreement to increase Medicaid funding and increase the FMAP for Fiscal Years 2020 and 2021.

“The Department of Human Services and I would have preferred a permanent fix to the long-standing Medicaid disparities in treatment of the Territories,” Governor Bryan said. “But we very much appreciate the work of Congress and the Trump Administration to craft this intermittent deal, which avoids significant negative impacts on our health care system and our people that would have been caused by falling off the Medicaid cliff.”

The Department of Human Services is working closely with the Virgin Islands Office of Management and Budget to finalize identifying the 17 percent matching funding the Government of the Virgin Islands.

OMB Director Jenifer O’Neal has indicated that sufficient funds have been budgeted across all categories to match the Medicaid grants for Fiscal Year 2020, at a total of \$14 million dollars, which will allow DHS and the Government of the Virgin Islands to meet its federally mandated obligation.

The Department of Human Services is committed to providing social services that will enhance the quality of life for individuals and families with diverse needs and to work toward our vision to empower individuals and families toward self-sufficiency through a seamless delivery system.

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