



THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
GOVERNMENT HOUSE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 15, 2020

Press Contact

Richard Motta

340-474-2399

www.vi.gov

richard.mottajr@go.vi.gov

Governor Bryan Takes Action on Legislation

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS — Governor Albert Bryan Jr. on Tuesday took action on four bills, including approving a measure allowing the Government to issue up to \$120 million in Revenue Anticipation Notes for government operations to fight the COVID-19 virus.

Bill No. 33-0287 will help the Government of the Virgin Islands mitigate cash flow issues resulting from the economic impact of the Coronavirus, according to Governor Bryan’s letter to Senate President Novelle Francis Jr.

“I commend the Legislature for acting promptly on this measure as this bill will provide substantial liquidity, enable the Government to offset revenue losses due to the impact of COVID-19, and avoid layoffs of government employees,” the Governor wrote.

Governor Bryan vetoed Bill No. 33-0290, which seeks to reduce the amount of time that the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority can “back bill” customers and redefine the utility’s billing cycle, because he said a reasonable period of three months limiting back billing already is in place under ACT 7373.

The Governor said that all businesses need to have an ample amount of time to correct errors, both in favor and against customers, and that most errors often are not identified until two billing cycles have passed.

“To limit WAPA, or any business for that matter, to only one billing cycle or thirty days to correct an error could be crippling,” Governor Bryan wrote in the transmittal letter.

The Governor also said Bill No. 33-0290 would create an inability for WAPA to bill after a disaster, such as a hurricane when delayed billing is essential.

Governor Bryan also said the bill does not take into consideration the potential interference with WAPA's bondholder responsibilities to not change any operating financial terms that could affect the payment of bonds.

"As I understand this bill to be reactionary to WAPA's change in billing, we must also recognize that the current back-billing limitation is restrictive enough," Governor Bryan wrote.

The Governor also vetoed Bill No. 33-0289, which seeks to add Doctors of Podiatric Medicine to the definition sections under the Board of Medical Examiners and Physician Assistants Licensing provisions because the bill does not accomplish its goal of expanding patient services in the field of Podiatry by including a definition of podiatrists as physicians allowed to supervise physician assistants.

The Governor said Bill 33-0289 falls short on two fronts:

- CMS regulations, specifically Medicare, do not reimburse for services performed by a physician assistant being supervised by a podiatrist, and reimbursement is available only for services performed by a physician assistant under the supervision of a Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) or Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (D.O.)
- Physician assistants are trained as medical generalists and not explicitly trained in podiatry, and doctors practicing in the field of podiatry require specialty training beyond general medicine.

Governor Bryan said doctors in the field of podiatry and physician assistants, including the American Academy of Physician Assistants, do not support this legislation, which has been opposed by 40 states.

"If the Legislature intends to expand the scope of Physician Assistants practicing in the Territory, I encourage them to review the legislation passed in other states," Governor Bryan wrote. "If it is the Legislature's intent to expand the availability of podiatrists in the Territory, I also encourage them to consider enacting Interstate Medical Licensure Compact legislation, to improve access to care (including podiatrists) using telemedicine across states and expand license portability for Physician Assistants."

The Governor signed into law Bill No. 33-0278, which adds additional provisions to enable the closing on the disaster recovery funding-based line of credit.

"I would like to bring to your attention that the amendments requested by bond counsel for the Government of the Virgin Islands to effectuate the full intent of this bill, which were submitted to your office on February 27, 2020, are still necessary and advisable in order to properly structure the borrowing contemplated by the Government of the Virgin Islands to fund the Hurricane Disaster Recovery Projects," Governor Bryan wrote.

The Governor also acknowledged receipt of Resolution No. 1866, which petitions the U.S. Congress to include the U.S. Virgin Islands in all federal aid packages and legislation related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

####