

FREDERIKSTED HEALTH CARE, INC.

FREDERIKSTED HEALTH CENTER/INGEBORG NESBITT CLINIC
ST. CROIX EDUCATIONAL COMPLEX – SCHOOL BASED HEALTH CENTER

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COMMITTEE OF APPROPRIATIONS & BUDGET

August 29, 2013

**FREDERIKSTED HEALTH CARE, INC.
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ST. CROIX EDUCATIONAL COMPLEX – SCHOOL BASED HEALTH CENTER
FREDERIKSTED HEALTH CARE DENTAL EAST**

Good afternoon Honorable Senator Graham, committee members, and other members of the Senate. My name is Dr. Jamila Benn. I serve not only as a staff physician but also am the Chief Medical Officer at Frederiksted Health Care. We are the only Federally Qualified Health Center on the island of St. Croix. Included in our mission is to provide quality health care to all people- insured or not, regardless of their ability to pay. This morning I would like to give you a brief overview of the clinical accomplishments and challenges of FHC since the last budget hearing.

We have been back at our home site for almost 2 years now. During this time FHC has undergone a tremendous amount of growth. The year 2012 marked an increase in the number of patient encounters - from 13,000 to almost 18, 000 visits. As my dental colleague will mention in her testimony- we expanded dental service and soon found the need for an additional site on the east side of the island which actually began operations in October 2012. Noting an increasing

need for pediatric care, we welcomed back to FHC Dr. Mavis Matthew who to this day continues to provide care to children a few hours each week at our site. November 2012 also saw resumption of Nutritional counseling services. Dr. Letitia Henry, dietician, provides both group and individual session 2 times per week. Thus far in 2013, we have continued to grow. I am happy to report that FHC was able to recruit a full time OBGyn and in July 2013 we welcomed her, Dr. Shavell Karel, a native born Crucian, back home. With the upcoming expansion of public healthcare, we have started making plans to accommodate the anticipated surge in people presenting for care. If approved- we hope to open another community health center on the east side of St. Croix by the end of this year.

Recall that in February 2011 FHC switched 100% to electronic medical record charting. Our dental department began utilizing electronic dental records almost immediately at both sites. In compliance with local law, all of our providers--- physicians, dentists and mid-levels alike, have been electronically prescribing prescriptions since November of 2010. We are finally happy to report that since June 2013 we have been offering this service to our MAP patients as well.

At the health center, we continue to provide many services including: pediatric and adult medicine, gynecology, and obstetrics including high risk perinatology, nutrition, behavioral health services, and even optometry. In an effort to decrease the load from our only emergency room at Juan F. Luis Hospital, we provide care for urgent issues for example- colds and minor lacerations. We can even address mild dehydration with IV fluids if necessary. We continue to participate in the federal program Vaccines for Children, ensuring that our

pediatric patients to the age of 18 receive all their vaccinations whether or not they have insurance coverage.

We play a large role in providing dental and medical entrance exams for the Head Start program. To decrease the cost and to improve the efficiency of these exams, we have purchased 2 laboratory machines for point of care testing, lead and anemia screens. Lead when elevated in a child can cause an irreversible form of mental retardation. Anemia, or low blood count, most commonly caused by iron deficiency, can lead to neurodevelopmental problems and may even contribute to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, problems with immune system, and aberrant growth patterns. Both screening tests require only a small sample of blood easily obtained from a finger stick, thus reducing anxiety of both parent and patient alike. Within 10 minutes we have the result of both tests and can manage patients on the same day of a potential diagnosis. We continue to cooperate with the Department of Health in identifying children with elevated lead levels, so that environmental government officials can investigate the source of elevated lead levels and perhaps one day establish a remediation program for the territory.

We continue to work with our local Medicare Quality Improvement Organization- Virgin Islands Medical Institute. In December 2012, we participated on the panel during their Quality Improvement Symposium-We Learn, We Act, We Achieve- here in St. Thomas at the University of the Virgin Islands. In January 2013, FHC received a nationally recognized award from HRSA- for work done with the Patient Safety and Clinical Pharmacy Services Collaborative with VIMI. This award was for our Brown Bag Initiative, whereby we give our patients a brown

bag to bring all of their medication with them to all medical visits. Thereby medication reconciliation can be conducted which would reduce negative prescription interactions.

We continue partnership with the AIDS Education Training Center (AETC). In January, some of our providers, nurses and staff members began participating in bi-monthly teleconference grand rounds in which medical didactics pertaining to HIV care are taught. This is also a forum where expert advice can be sought for tough cases. In May, we co-hosted with AETC, a continuing education conference entitled HIV: Proactive Primary Care Encounters. Community physicians and dentists were invited to this combined discipline event in which HIV in the primary medical and dental settings were discussed.

Just last month, we participated and co-hosted with the Delegate to Congress a town hall meeting of the 20th Congressional Black Caucus. Because of our organization's growth and steadfast commitment to quality care our CEO has deemed us ready to apply for formal nationwide recognition as a Patient Center Medical Home.

In a continued effort to provide for the community's healthcare needs, we have maintained extended medical service hours on Wednesdays until 7pm. Our providers continue to rotate home call in which medical telephone advice only for our patients is available during the hours when the health center is closed. We continue our outreach efforts in the community having participated in several events across the island over the course of the year. Our lab continues to flourish, having been reaccredited this year by COLA, a nationally recognized premier laboratory consultation and accrediting organization. Our Behavioral Health

Specialist, Rachel Pakenham, continues to work with other community entities in the Public Health Model of Violence Prevention Collaboration. Additionally in October she will start a post partum depression prevention class for prenatal patients.

In an effort to meet one of our goals , to be a teaching organization,we continue to host students from universities across the United States including Tufts,Yale, Barry, StoneyBrook, Keiser,State University of New York, and of course the University of the Virgin Islands. This opportunity has allowed us to recruit some of the best and brightest students who will remain or return to FHC at the completion of their studies. We at FHC consider teaching not only an honor, but an important responsibility for the future of our community.

With the closing of HOVENSA and the subsequent loss of jobs that supported the oil refinery, we at FHC have had to say goodbye to several of our patients and families who have been made economic refugees due to the sudden depression in our economy. On the other hand, we have seen a fair amount of a growth in the number of patients who no longer have insurance. Our challenge with this population continues to be convincing them that our community health center provides the same or better health care than that at a private provider's office.

A continued challenge remains the recruitment of full time qualified licensed clinical professionals. Again this is due to our comparatively low salaries that place us at a disadvantage as we compete for dwindling numbers of primary care health personnel and as the educational debt of new physicians and dentists rises exponentially. As I reported in the previous years, one of the best potential recruiting opportunities is through the National Health Services Corp or NHSC.

This is federal program under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration. This program targets physicians, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, midwives, dentists, dental hygienists, and licensed mental health professionals. There is even a program to assist registered nursing students. In exchange for educational funds, providers agree to work in a health professions shortage area for a required amount of time. Most recently, FHC has had 3 providers who successfully completed their obligation and are now student loan debt free. Two of the three providers are still on staff with us today. Currently we have 2 providers who are in NHSC program now. The benefit of NHSC is that it gives us access to providers who are committed to and understand the challenges of working in an underserved area. The issue of obtaining the permanent medical licensure required by the federal program versus the special unrestricted medical license the local medical board is willing to provide continues to be the largest obstacle in recruiting these qualified health care professionals to our facility. The executive staff of FHC will continue to lobby both NHSC and the local medical and dental board for a meeting on middle ground to ensure future professionals' participation in this beneficial opportunity without compromising the security and credentialing checks put in place to protect our community.

Overall, FHC staff and I remain committed to assuring that Frederiksted Health Center continues to be a primary force in the advancement of medicine and dentistry, along with the promotion of health to all people of St. Croix. I would like to thank you for your past support of our organization. Funding of our requested budget appropriations is an integral part in the success of appropriately

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staffing the health center, serving our patients where they can access care, and enhancing the health of our users through offering consistent and reliable services.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to provide clinical updates of the Frederiksted Community Health Center.

Respectfully submitted by Jamila Benn MD