

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

BILL NO. 33-0134

Thirty-Third Legislature of the Virgin Islands

August 13, 2019

An act amending title 17, chapter 15 of the Virgin Islands Code to establish a Psychiatric Medical Doctoral Program Scholarship

PROPOSED BY: Senators Kurt A. Violet and Steven D. Payne, Sr.

1 **WHEREAS**, for decades, the Department of Health has had to share a psychiatrist
2 with the hospitals and the Bureau of Corrections in both districts;

3 **WHEREAS**, the Department of Health currently does not have a psychiatrist on staff,
4 and the position is one of several key positions that have remained vacant;

5 **WHEREAS**, a state of emergency for mental healthcare was declared in the United
6 States Virgin Islands via Executive Order due to a shortage of psychiatric physicians and
7 behavioral health providers;

8 **WHEREAS**, the Department of Health is responsible for health promotions and
9 protection, regulation of healthcare providers and facilities, and policy development and
10 planning, as well as maintaining the vital statistics for the population;

11 **WHEREAS**, the Department of Health has utilized funds to support off-island care for
12 behavioral clients; and

1 **WHEREAS**, strengthening mental health care, expanding critical health care services,
2 and improving the delivery of mental health and behavioral services are priority throughout
3 the Territory; Now, therefore,

4 ***Be it enacted by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands:***

5 **SECTION 1.** Title 17, chapter 15 of the Virgin Islands Code is amended by adding a
6 new appropriately designated section to read as follows:

7 (a) There is hereby established the Virgin Islands Psychiatry Program Scholarship
8 Fund which shall be administered by the Virgin Islands Department of Education (the Board),
9 for Virgin Islands residents pursuing a career in psychiatry.

10 (b) The Board shall establish rules and regulations governing the form of
11 applications, the granting of scholarships, eligibility requirements, an annual renewal policy,
12 and minimum performance standards upon which the scholarship grant shall initially be
13 awarded and thereafter renewed. Within ninety (90) days after the enactment of this section,
14 the Board shall adopt forms to be used by applicants for the Virgin Islands Psychiatry
15 Scholarship, establish an annual award date, and adopt such rules and regulations which are
16 not inconsistent with this section for carrying out the provisions of this section.

17 (c) Scholarships may be granted to applicants who are residents of the Virgin
18 Islands but who temporarily live outside of the Virgin Islands and who manifest an intent to
19 return to the Virgin Islands. Each applicant must have attended school in the Virgin Islands
20 for at least six (6) years, must be a graduate from a Virgin Islands high school, must have been
21 accepted or currently enrolled in a Doctor of Medicine (MD) or Doctor of Osteopathic
22 Medicine (DO) program, must have pledged to complete a residency in psychiatry and/or
23 fellowship in psychiatry, and must maintain at least a 3.0 GPA while in the medical program.

(d) Scholarships granted under this section shall be granted to two individuals per year, with one recipient from the district of St. Croix and one recipient from the district of St. Thomas-St. John. Scholarships shall be awarded in an amount up to, but not exceeding \$40,000, each academic year, per recipient, for a maximum of four (4) years. The scholarship amount must be applied to the payment of tuition, lodging, books, supplies and academic fees to an accredited medical school.

(e) A student receiving a scholarship under this section shall sign a contract committing to return to the Virgin Islands upon completion of a residency in psychiatry or a fellowship in psychiatry, to work for two years at the Department of Health for each scholarship award year. Scholarship recipients must agree that failure to comply with any of the provisions of this section shall result in the scholarship becoming a loan payable to the Government of the Virgin Islands in the amount of the scholarship awarded, plus ten percent (10%) of the total amount of the scholarship.

(f) Funds for the Psychiatric Medical Doctoral Program Scholarship shall be made available from an annual appropriation from the "Education Initiative Fund". Any money collected as a result of non-compliance pursuant to subsection (e) of this section shall be deposited in the "Education Initiative Fund".

Bill Summary

This Bill amends title 17, chapter 15 of the Virgin Islands Code relating to educational scholarships, by establishing a Virgin Islands Psychiatry Program Scholarship.

BR19-0348/July 23, 2019/EEM