GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

STATEMENT

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STATEMENT BY THE HONOURABLE VINCENT O. WHEATLEY MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AT THE FIFTH SITTING OF THE THIRD SESSION OF THE FIFTH HOA OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS WEDNESDAY, 21ST OCTOBER, 2026 PAHO Technical Mission on the Development of Rights

Release Date: 28 October, 2026

Madam Speaker, I rise today to inform this Honourable House of an important initiative recently undertaken by the Ministry of Health and Social Development in collaboration with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) to strengthen mental healthcare in The Virgin Islands.

Earlier this year, the Ministry hosted an in-country technical mission to support the development of a modern, rights-based Mental Health Policy and develop a Mental Health Bill for The Virgin Islands. This mission forms part of the Government's ongoing commitment to modernising the Territory's mental health legislative and policy framework to ensure that it reflects international human rights standards, contemporary best practices, and the evolving needs of our community.

Madam Speaker, mental health is a vital component of overall health and well-being. It affects individuals, families, workplaces, and communities, and is fundamental to social and economic development. It is therefore essential that our

laws and policies promote dignity, protect the rights of persons living with mental health conditions, encourage person-centred and community-based care, and provide an enabling framework for prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and recovery. The technical mission represented a significant step towards achieving these objectives.

During the mission, the PAHO technical team worked closely with the Ministry of Health and Social Development, the BVI Health Services Authority, the Attorney General's Chambers, and other relevant government agencies to review the Territory's existing mental health legislation, policies, and service delivery arrangements.

The consultants conducted site visits to mental health facilities and related services to gain a comprehensive understanding of the current system and identify opportunities for improvement. A series of stakeholder consultations were also conducted throughout the week, bringing together representatives from government ministries and departments, healthcare professionals, the education sector, the justice sector, social services, civil society organisations, faith-based organisations, caregivers, persons with lived experiences, and other key stakeholders. These consultations provided an opportunity for participants to identify existing strengths, discuss current challenges, and contribute to the development of a modern legislative and policy framework that reflects the realities, aspirations, and priorities of The Virgin Islands.

Madam Speaker, I am particularly encouraged by the strong interest that has been expressed in this initiative. The anticipated broad participation from across the public and private sectors reflects a collective commitment to strengthening mental health services and ensuring that the voices of those who provide, support, and access these services are represented throughout the reform process. The technical mission represented the first phase of a broader programme of work. It will inform a comprehensive legal and situational analysis, the development of policy recommendations and drafting instructions, and ultimately the preparation of a new Mental Health Policy and Mental Health Bill. These draft instruments will subsequently be subject to further stakeholder engagement and public consultation before progressing through the Government's policy approval and

legislative processes.

Madam Speaker, this initiative demonstrates the Government's commitment to building a modern, equitable, and rights-based mental health system that promotes prevention, early intervention, treatment, rehabilitation, and social inclusion, while safeguarding the dignity, autonomy, and human rights of all persons.

I wish to express the Government's sincere appreciation to PAHO for its continued partnership and technical support. We also thank the many stakeholders who participated in this important exercise and contributed their expertise and experience to shaping the future of mental healthcare in The Virgin Islands.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Health and Social Development looks forward to advancing the development of a modern legislative and policy framework that will strengthen mental healthcare and improve outcomes for present and future generations.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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