

ACT NO. 8739

BILL NO. 35-0029

THIRTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

Regular Session

2023

An Act honoring and commending Donna Marie Christian-Christensen M.D., and bestowing the Virgin Islands Medal of Honor upon her for her tireless contributions to the people of the Virgin Islands in the medical field and representation in the United States Congress

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WHEREAS, Donna Marie Christian-Christensen is the daughter of the late Judge Almeric Christian and Virginia Sterling Christian and the granddaughter of the late esteemed Virgin Islands educator Elena Christian; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Christian-Christensen is the mother of two daughters, Rabiah Green George and Karida Green, and the grandmother of Nia Elena Hamilton, Kobe George, Layla Maria George and Nealia Williams; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Christian-Christensen earned a Bachelor of Science in 1966 at St. Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana, and an M.D. (Doctor of Medicine) in 1970 from George Washington University School of Medicine in Washington, D.C.; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Christian-Christensen interned at Pacific Medical Center in San Francisco, California from 1970 to 1971; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Christian-Christensen did her residency in family medicine at Howard University Medical Center from 1973 to 1974 before returning to the United States Virgin Islands; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Christian-Christensen became a board-certified physician in 1977; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Christian-Christensen first became politically active in the 1980s as part of the Coalition to Appoint A Native Judge, which emphasized judicial appointments from within the Virgin Islands community and later as part of the Save Fountain Valley Coalition, which called for the protection of St. Croix's north side from overdevelopment; and

WHEREAS, during that time, Dr. Christian-Christensen concurrently served the Virgin Islands Department of Health as an Emergency Room physician, Maternal and Child Health physician, Medical Director of the Ingeborg Nesbitt Clinic, Director of the Frederiksted Health Center, Director of Maternal Child Health and Family Planning, Medical Director of the Juan F. Luis Hospital, and Territorial Assistant Commissioner; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Christian-Christensen continued to delve into politics and advocacy and served as the Democratic National Committeewoman from 1984 to 1994, as Vice-Chair of the Territorial Committee of the Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands, as a Delegate to Democratic National Conventions, and on the Platform Committee of the Democratic National Committee. She also served on the Virgin Islands Board of Education from 1984 to 1986 and on the Virgin Islands Status Commission from 1988 to 1982; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Christian-Christensen also served as the President of the Virgin Islands Medical Institute, and as a Trustee of the National Medical Association; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Christian-Christensen was elected to serve as the Territory's Delegate to the United States Congress in 1996; and

WHEREAS, Delegate Christian-Christensen was the first female physician to serve as a member of the U.S. Congress, the first woman to represent an offshore territory, and the first woman delegate from the U.S. Virgin Islands; and

WHEREAS, Delegate Christian-Christensen served nine consecutive terms, from 1997 to 2014, as Delegate to Congress from the United States Virgin Islands; and

WHEREAS, during her tenure, Delegate Christian-Christensen served on several committee and sub-committees of the U.S. House of Representatives, most notably on the Committee on Energy and Commerce and its Subcommittee on Health; Committee on Natural Resources and its Subcommittee on Insular Affairs and National Parks; Committee on Homeland Security and Committee on Small Business; and

WHEREAS, soon after her election to Congress, Delegate Christian-Christensen was named the Chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus' Health Braintrust, which brought together experts in minority health from across the world to discuss, deliberate on and craft policy and legislative initiatives on all levels of government; and

WHEREAS, Delegate Christian-Christensen chaired the CBC Health Braintrust for 15 years; and

WHEREAS, during Delegate Christian-Christensen's tenure, the CBC Health Braintrust addressed a myriad of issues to include: the disparities that confront minorities as they try to access the health care system, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, substance abuse and its effects, the need for more minority physicians and health care professionals, and the need for affordable, accessible health care for all; and

WHEREAS, it was through this role as Chair of the CBC Health Braintrust that Delegate Christian-Christensen was recognized for her role in not only increasing critical funding for HIV/AIDS and other minority health issues to the U.S. territories and to communities of color around the country, but to the countries across the Caribbean; and

WHEREAS, Delegate Donna Marie Christian-Christensen was critical in gaining an increasing amount of Medicaid funding for the territories, as a means of improving access to healthcare; and

WHEREAS, because of her service as a physician and as a former member of Congress, Donna Marie Christian-Christensen is known locally, nationally, and internationally as an advocate for minority health; and

WHEREAS, Delegate Christian-Christensen, as a member of the Subcommittee on Health, was instrumental in obtaining funding for telehealth, information technology and comparative research to reduce healthcare costs in the Territory; and

WHEREAS, Delegate Christian-Christensen was influential in advocating for minority health in the Affordable Care Act; and

WHEREAS, Delegate Christian-Christensen received major awards because of her health care advocacy; and

WHEREAS, in 1999, Delegate Christian-Christensen's alma mater, the George Washington University, honored her as a distinguished alumnus; and

WHEREAS, in 2001, Delegate Christian-Christensen received an Honorary Doctor of Laws from Moravian College in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania; and

WHEREAS, in 2003, Delegate Christian-Christensen was honored by the National Institutes of Health with the National Library of Medicine's Changing Face of Medicine Award; and

WHEREAS, that same year, Delegate Christian-Christensen also received an Honorary Doctor of Science degree from St. George's University in Grenada, West Indies; and

WHEREAS, in 2010, Delegate Christian-Christensen received the Dr. Nathan Davis Outstanding U.S. Representative Award from the American Medical Association; and

WHEREAS, in 2011, Delegate Christian-Christensen received a Leadership Award from the Caribbean HIV/AIDS Conference in the Bahamas for her role in extending the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief funds to the Caribbean; and

WHEREAS, that same year, Delegate Christian-Christensen gave the Inaugural Lecture at the University of the Virgin Islands Caribbean Exploratory Research Center; and

WHEREAS, in 2011, Delegate Christian-Christensen received a Leadership Award from the Caribbean HIV/AIDS Conference in the Bahamas for her role in extending the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief funds to the Caribbean; and

WHEREAS, that same year, Delegate Christian-Christensen gave the Inaugural Lecture at the University of the Virgin Islands Caribbean Exploratory Research Center; and

WHEREAS, throughout her career, Delegate Christian-Christensen combined her love of medicine and health care with her passion and skill in politics; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Christian-Christensen continues to be an active member of the local and national Democratic Party; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Christian-Christensen's public service to her community includes: a member and officer of several community organizations, such as: the Queen Louise Home, the St. Croix Environmental Association, the Women's Coalition of St. Croix, the St. Croix Central High Parent Teacher Association, the Caribbean Dance Company, the Caribbean Studies Association, the Caribbean Youth Organization and the Faith Moravian Church; and

WHEREAS, in retirement, Dr. Christian-Christensen has served as a health policy advisor to the Virgin Islands Department of Health providing critical counsel during the coronavirus pandemic; Now, Therefore,

Be it enacted by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands:

SECTION 1. The Legislature of the Virgin Islands, on behalf of the people of the Virgin Islands, honors and commends Donna Marie Christian-Christensen, M.D., for her service to the Virgin Islands community both in the medical field and in the United States House of Representatives.

SECTION 2. The Charles Harwood Memorial Complex, once demolished and rebuilt, shall be renamed "The Donna M. Christian-Christensen M.D. Virgin Islands Department of Health".

SECTION 3. The Department of Health shall place a sign bearing the inscription "The Donna M. Christian-Christensen M.D. Virgin Islands Department of Health" at the entrance. If the Department of Health relocates to another location, the successor building must carry the name "The Donna M. Christian-Christensen M.D., Virgin Islands Department of Health."

SECTION 4. Pursuant to title 1 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 7, section 103, the Thirty-Fifth Legislature of the Virgin Islands, on behalf of the people of the Virgin Islands, honors Donna M. Christian-Christensen, M.D., by awarding her the Virgin Islands Medal of Honor in recognition of her outstanding public service to the people of the Virgin Islands.

SECTION 5. The President of the Legislature, or the President's designee, shall present a perma plaque copy of this Act and the Virgin Islands Medal of Honor to Donna Marie Christian-Christensen M.D., or a designee, at an appropriate ceremony.

SECTION 6. (a) The sum of \$5,000.00 is appropriated in the fiscal year ending September 30, 2023, from the General Fund of the Government of the Virgin Islands to the Department of Health to erect the appropriate signage.

(b) The funds appropriated in subsection (a) shall remain available until expended.

Thus passed by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands on July 20, 2023.

Witness our Hands and Seal of the Legislature of the Virgin Islands this 24th Day of July, A.D., 2023.



Novelle E. Francis, Jr.
President

Carla J. Joseph
Secretary



Bill No. 35-0029 is hereby approved.

Witness my hand and the Seal of the Government of the United States Virgin Islands at Christiansted, St. Croix, This 4th day of August, 2023 A.D.

Albert Bryan Jr.
Governor