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Unresolved Issues Plague V.I. Taxicab Commission Amid Executive Director's Medical Leave

Government / **Published On September 18, 2023 06:00 AM /**

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Taxis at the Cyril E. King Airport on April 30, 2023 at 1:39 p.m. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM

During Friday's meeting of the V.I. Taxicab Commission, frustrations flared as board members grappled with longstanding operational and budgetary issues. One significant factor contributing to the delays is the medical absence of Executive Director Vernice Gumbs, who has been critical to the commission's operations.

The board recalled previous accomplishments, such as the adoption of new bylaws and signing of a memorandum of understanding for training and certification of taxi drivers with the Department of Tourism and the University of the Virgin Islands Center for Excellence in Leadership and

Learning (UVI-CELL). "I truly anticipate that this is going to be happening much sooner than later," said Board Secretary Myrna George, who is overseeing the St. Thomas office during Ms. Gumbs's absence.

However, key outstanding items remain, including the contract for a new administrative enforcement officer and payments for two overdue invoices. Board Chair Loretta Lloyd pointed out these unresolved issues contributed to delays and budgetary challenges. Lloyd said the commission was "waiting for the Treasury Department to send us what they have" regarding financial discrepancies that have stymied progress on their FY 2024 budget.

The situation is exacerbated by staff shortages. Ms. George has been handling financial transactions due to her bonded status, filling in for the absent cashier. She has also been supervising other administrative tasks until Ms. Gumbs can return. Enforcement officers have even been recalled to desk duty to assist with day-to-day operations.

Adding to the commission's challenges is the absence of Vice Chair Elizabeth Watley at key meetings, which Board Secretary George noted has hampered staffing decisions. Board member Sweeney Toussaint expressed frustration over the lack of concrete timelines for resolving these critical issues, calling the situation "not acceptable."

Ms. George said that communication with the absent executive director is ongoing and that Ms. Gumbs is doing her best to move business forward. However, Toussaint questioned the logic of waiting for an undetermined return date for Ms. Gumbs. He suggested appointing someone to identify and address the ongoing delays, clarifying that his comments were aimed at resolving the issues, not critiquing Ms. Gumbs's performance.

Ms. Lloyd defended the executive director's role, stating that operational delays were more a result of budget woes than any lack of effort. Some board members accused Mr. Toussaint of grandstanding, pointing out that the commission is critically understaffed. Ms. George has been "working two jobs," according to Ms. Lloyd, juggling her role at the commission and her position as deputy commissioner of the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs.

Before closing, the board fielded questions from the public, advising one individual facing challenges with the transfer of a medallion to seek assistance from the absent executive director.