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Legislation Afoot to Place Taxicab Commission Back Under DLCA; Governor Expresses Support for Uber, Lyft in USVI

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During the Consortium's wide-ranging exclusive interview with Governor Albert Bryan Jr. on Thursday, discussion turned to the subject of the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission, which has been criticized for months by lawmakers and industry stakeholders for its dysfunctional operations.

Requests have been pouring in from senators, taxi drivers and commissioners themselves for the governor to take immediate steps to either renew the appointments of board members whose tenures have long lapsed, or immediately appoint new people to the board who will have a fresh mandate to make much-needed decisions.

However, Governor Bryan on Thursday disclosed that he is anticipating a much larger fix: “We’re actually waiting on legislation to put it back into the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs,” he announced. “We’ve been talking to a couple senators on it.”

Mr. Bryan believes that the current structure of the commission is unnecessary. “We don’t need a whole board and a commission for this. We just need a department under [the DLCA].” He said that discussions were being had about how the new structure would look. “Do we have a commission as something that just decides things like tariffs, and rules and regulations, but direct control of what goes on on a day-to-day basis, being operated under DLCA,” he hypothesized, noting that that would be his preference. Despite the intention, Governor Bryan acknowledged that in the interim, “there may be a need to get a new board.”

Suggestions to open up another department were not practical, the governor argued. “We don’t have the people or the resources to do all these different things.”

Apart from the licensing and regulation of taxis, Governor Bryan said that other operators in the market needed attention. “There’s the chauffeurs and these limo cars and stuff that needs to be regulated,” he remarked, underscoring the need for a functional regulatory regime to deal with these issues. He supports the introduction of ride-sharing services as well, saying that he was in favor of legislation brought by Senator Javan James on the issue. “I think we’re fooling ourselves like we always do into believing that we could regulate the world outside of the Virgin Islands,” the governor argued. “If there is a market for something, there are people who are going to create a service for that market.”

Ride-sharing services similar to Lyft and Uber, the governor said, would be extremely beneficial to residents in the territory. “We don’t have enough taxi drivers,” he asserted. “I think that we are costing ourselves money.” He noted that while trips such as airport transfers, hotel pickups and tours were highly regulated, it was more difficult for locals to move around. “We want to go out on a Saturday night, we want to go to dinner or something, we want to go partying on the town, we should have a system where residents could move back and forth freely for a reasonable cost,” Governor Bryan said.