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Proposed Legislation To Move Taxicab Operations Back Under DLCA Held Back For Tweaks

Governor Albert Bryan backs legislation for comprehensive taxicab and tour operator regulations

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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

Legislation aimed at reforming the beleaguered Taxicab Commission has been held back for now, following a meeting by industry stakeholders last week.

A joint meeting of taxicab operators and officials on all three islands was convened last Monday by Senator Donna Frett-Gregory, who along with several colleagues have been working on finding a way out of the operational dysfunction of the Commission, which has been drawing

complaints from the taxi sector for over a year.

During the meeting, Frett-Gregory presented a bill that would dissolve the current structure of the Commission and create a Division of Transportation and Taxicab Services within the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs. The division, according to the legislation, would assume the duties and responsibilities currently held by the Taxicab Commission, and perform the administrative functions of the taxi industry. An Advisory Council, including medallion owners, non medallion owners, and members of the general public, would serve to propose fees, promulgate regulations, and suggest changes to prevailing statutes.

The intention of the draft legislation [is supported](#) by Governor Albert Bryan, who said in an October interview with the Consortium that not only did taxicab operations need to be reformed, but that regulations need to be expanded to cover other players in the industry, including tour operators. “This legislation was really to cure the challenges that we’re having,” said Frett-Gregory in response to questions from Consortium journalists.

However, during a meeting of the Senate Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs and Consumer Protection on November 21, chair Senator Carla Joseph explained that the draft bill had been removed from the agenda. Based on the “very robust discussion” emanating out of the industry stakeholder meeting, she said, “it was decided by the bill sponsor to pull this bill off the agenda so that we could have some further discussion and amendments.”

Frett-Gregory said that several taxi operators, especially those on St. John, expressed major concerns about moving back under the auspices of DLCA. She explained that their trepidation stems from an audit years ago which found poor procedures surrounding cash collection and management. However, the senator argued that the introduction of the ERP system by the Department of Finance has largely eliminated all issues surrounding payments, as manually-written paper receipts have been replaced with an automatically generated receipt from the system once a payment has been made.

Even so, larger issues still remain. “In that meeting, I really realized that this is an overarching issue that requires a deeper dive,” Frett-Gregory disclosed, speaking about the need to ensure “fairness and accountability across the board.” She pointed out as an example that taxi operators must have a medallion for each vehicle that they operate, while limousine services may run several vehicles under one umbrella. “It’s something that really needs a committee like the [proposed] advisory board to really sit down and determine what’s best for the industry,” she said.

While lawmakers and legislative drafters continue to work on the proposed bill ahead of its eventual appearance on the Senate floor, the current VITCC and its operations continue to receive criticism from the taxicab community as well as from members of government. Senator Ray Fonseca, who attended the stakeholder meeting last Monday, said he was “convinced the current Taxicab Commission is not executing its duties with the due diligence” that would solve its many issues. He opined that as currently configured, the Commission “does not effectively serve the needs of the transportation, taxicab, and automobile for hire industry.”