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Dysfunctional Operations and Delayed Payments in Spotlight as Lawmakers Debate Future of Taxicab Commission

Executive Director Vernice Gumbs and Board Chair Loretta Lloyd advocate for Commission's independence amid funding and operational challenges

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V.I. Taxicab Commission Executive Director Vernice Gumbs. By. THE V.I. LEGISLATURE

The voice of Vernice Gumbs, executive director of the V.I. Taxicab Commission was heard in the territory's legislative chambers for the [first time in several months](#), as she testified before the Senate Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs and Consumer Protection on

Monday.

Finally able to provide a verbal account of the commission's affairs, Ms. Gumbs told lawmakers she disagreed with the suggestions to [subsume the commission](#) under the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs, even telling Senator Milton Potter that moving to DLCA should be considered a last resort.

According to Ms. Gumbs, the Taxicab Commission deserves an opportunity to first hire the necessary staff and digitize its operations. The preferred arrangement would be to "allow the process to work before taking it over to DLCA or any other agency," suggested Ms. Gumbs. Her position was supported by chair of the Taxicab Commission board Loretta Lloyd, who flatly told lawmakers that she is not in favor of legislation that had recently been held in committee [pending additional discussion](#).

The two representatives provided lawmakers with a [laundry list of challenges](#) facing the commission. Chief among them was a need for additional funding to balance human resource needs, pay off debts, and digitize every aspect of TCC's operations.

"In the VITCC's FY2024 budget, the Taxicab Commission requested funding for ten positions, which included five existing positions and five vacant positions. Instead, the Legislature appropriated the sum of \$650,383 specifically to fund only the filled positions," explained Ms. Gumbs. The appropriation came after [months of canceled](#) budget hearings and the admission by VITCC officials that the agency's accounts are [plagued with financial discrepancies](#).

Ms. Gumbs told lawmakers that an additional \$500,000 would be necessary to keep TCC's "doors open."

Senator Marvin Blyden hinted that Senator Angel Bolques Jr. would introduce legislation during Tuesday's legislative session to allocate funding to the commission. However, lawmakers were told that this funding would only partially cover the digitization project, which is estimated to take around a year and cost approximately \$479,000. According to the testimonies of Ms. Gumbs and Ms. Lloyd, the central government was mainly responsible for the perceived shortcomings and reduced productivity of the Commission.

Ms. Gumbs lamented that due to the Department of Finance's delays in processing vendor payments, the VITCC's in-house attorney has not been paid, "and has placed all assignments from the board on hold until payments are received." Legal counsel was previously in the process of reviewing the commission's policies and procedures. However, Senator Samuel Carrion objected to her characterization of the issue. "Putting this burden on us as a body is totally inappropriate when the Taxicab Commission hasn't really been functioning," he declared.

He cited infrequent board meetings and regular absenteeism from members, which often prevented the board from establishing a five-member quorum. Ms. Lloyd reiterated to committee members that the terms of six of the seven members, herself included, have expired. As far as Ms. Lloyd was aware, reappointments had not yet been communicated.

"Appoint individuals or re-nominate individuals that you feel could get the job done to help clean up this industry," said Senator Alma Francis Heyliger, chastising the government for dragging its feet in that regard. Though she applauded Ms. Lloyd's commitment to the commission, Sen. Francis Heyliger suggested that it was time for the longtime executive director to "retire and step down." Governor Albert Bryan Jr., who previously indicated his support for moving VITCC under the auspices of DLCA, has suggested that he would not make any further appointments to the

commission as currently constituted.

Sen. Francis-Heyliger expressed her belief that there should be shared blame for TCC's issues. "All I'm hearing is issues that we helped create, that we didn't resolve, but we're consistently trying to dump everything on one agency." Her sentiments contrasted those of Sen. Blyden, who said, "I'm going to put the blame where it needs to be with you guys: the board and the director."

The commission was caught in a "vicious cycle," Sen. Milton Potter declared. "I think the commission was defunded because of lack of productivity, and because you're defunded, you're unable to be productive," he observed. Ms. Gumbs admitted that "we are caught in this loop where we're having financial challenges in getting vendors paid." Even janitorial services now have to be carried out by herself with the support of the administrative staff, she made known.

With no definitive decision on the future of the commission, its executive director says the commission will "continue lobbying for the funding needed to hire the necessary staff, pay its vendors and avoid any disruption in business by our industry operators, who are the last local business standing in the territory."