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Liberty VI Under Fire From Lawmakers for Service Quality Amid Network Migration

Lawmakers demand answers and improvements from telecom provider

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Liberty VI's new country manager Ravindra Maywahlall testified during the 35th Legislature's Committee on Housing, Transportation and Telecommunications hearing on Wednesday, Jan. 24, 2024. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

It was a baptism by fire for Liberty VI's new country manager Ravindra Maywahlall, as he was tasked on Wednesday by members of the Senate Committee on Housing, Transportation and Telecommunications with explaining ongoing service disruptions that have raised the ire of many customers, several lawmakers among them.

During Tuesday's meeting of the Committee on Government Operations, Public Services Commission Executive Director Sandra Setorie told senators that the PSC regularly receives complaints about subpar service from Liberty VI. The main themes, Ms. Setorie said, were dropped calls, delayed text messages, lack of coverage in some areas, billing issues, system updates and issues with group text messaging.

Though these gripes were not specifically addressed in his testimony on Wednesday, Mr. Maywahlall blamed the system changeover from AT&T to Liberty VI's network infrastructure, which started last June, for the issues. "The migration process has had its challenges, but we calculate that more than 95% of the customers experienced no issues during their migration," he estimated.

Lawmakers vehemently disagreed. "It's the worst service the people of this territory have ever experienced," Senator Franklin Johnson contended. Mr. Maywahlall's estimate, the senator countered, was "not a true statement at all." Senators Donna Frett-Gregory, Marvin Blyden, and several others wondered why so many Liberty VI customers were receiving "SOS" issues on their phones. Hiccups with migration were to blame for that complaint as well, according to Liberty, or perhaps being in a low-coverage area.

The company promised that it is currently "working tirelessly to finish the migration process," estimating that the project should be completed in the first half of the year. Once that is done, "we will be capable of offering our customers products that will be more USVI-centric," Mr. Maywahlall promised. There are still approximately 29,000 that the company is still working on migrating, it says.

However, these explanations did not mollify the 14 lawmakers who attended Wednesday's meeting. Several, including Senator Samuel Carrion, called for credits to be granted to affected customers. He described personal experiences of waiting for hours at Liberty retail outlets to receive attention from customer service agents, and pleaded with the company to pay attention, as according to him, many customers are "leaving Liberty and encouraging others to do so because of a lack of service."

The migration and its host of associated service disruptions, Senator Carrion told Mr. Maywahlall and his team, "is really affecting our quality of life and how we do business here in a territory." He tasked Liberty VI with assessing their operations to "make the necessary changes" as Virgin Islanders deserve better.

Compounding the frustration among Liberty customers, legislators argued, was the lack of sufficient communication from the company on the migration process. Even after Mr. Maywahlall's explanation that emails and text messages were sent to postpaid customers, while prepaid customers received texts ahead of time, lawmakers remained unconvinced. Senator Alma Francis-Heyliger also confronted Liberty over its failure to properly notify customers of the procedure to ensure continuity in service when traveling to the mainland.

Outside of promising to complete the migration efforts in short order, Liberty VI says it has recruited additional staff to assist in handling customer complaints. Mr. Maywahlall remained optimistic about what the Liberty experience would be for Virgin Islanders post-migration. "We are very excited about the future. We have built something completely new that, from the outset, always started with our customers' best interests in mind. The USVI now has a world-class telecom company that is focused on USVI market consumers," he asserted.

