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Lawmakers Suggest Takeover of V.I. Taxicab Commission by DLCA After Budget Hearing

Lawmakers express frustration over repeated delays and inadequate financial records from the V.I. Taxicab Commission

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

Lawmakers have suggested once again that the V.I. Taxicab Commission should be placed under the purview of the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs, following the Commission's appearance before Friday's meeting of the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance.

"They have the systems in place. They have the admin staff. They have all the additional staff who only need to get additional enforcement to get this work done," said Senator Donna-Frett to Vernice Gumbs, executive director of the TCC.

“We have to do what's best for the people of the Virgin Islands at this point...I am prepared to do what I have to do to address this situation,” the lawmaker promised.

In its FY2025 budget request, the Commission is seeking \$1,555,706.93. According to Ms. Gumbs, the figure “has taken into consideration additional responsibilities that are desperately needed.” Describing it as a “rock bottom” projection, she told lawmakers that anything less would “increase our challenges.” Of the figure, personnel accounts for \$445,968 while fringe benefits will cost the Commission \$226,018. Ms. Gumbs has also budgeted \$5,200 for supplies, and \$350,235.58 for vacancies including three taxi inspectors, a chief enforcement officer, an assistant executive director, a human resources coordinator, and an administrative secretary.

Among the Taxi Cab Commission’s financial requests for FY2025 is \$479,486.35 to establish an electronic data management system. According to Ms. Gumb, such a system would aid in the “immediate goal” of a “digital transformation of paper legacy records.” It wasn’t the first time lawmakers heard this request from the TCC. In March 2024, Ms. Gumbs appeared before the Finance Committee following a series of delays. In that [hearing](#), lawmakers learned of a disturbing lack of accurate, up-to-date financial records for the TCC. After the series of damning revelations, senators declined to vote on the agency’s budgetary request.

Other services and charges for FY 2025 are budgeted at \$48,800.

As of June 2024, the Taxicab Commission - originally envisioned to be a self-sustaining entity - had collected \$345,651.17. Ms. Gumbs said that in the next three months, the TCC anticipates collecting another \$300,000, for a total of over \$645,000. “These upcoming months are our busiest months,” she told budget committee members.

She also insisted that introducing the electronic management system would “increase collections, improve our effectiveness in serving the public by providing digital storage, collection and verification of records.” Ms. Gumbs remained adamant that “operations of a pen and paper office” remain one of the Commission’s greatest challenges.?

Throughout the hearing, lawmakers probed for details on the proposed electronic management system. She told Senator Ray Fonseca that a vendor for the system had been identified in FY2023, but “because of funding, it was placed on hold.” The TCC believes that the management of the system would need to be handled by outside contractors for at least the first year.

Lawmakers did not seem convinced that the system would necessarily improve the Commission’s operations in a meaningful way. “You are basically hung up on this database that you need to have electronically, when internally, you can begin to collect that information,” Frett-Gregory lamented. According to her, the economies of scale associated with the project were less than favorable. She appealed to Ms. Gumbs to instead seek support from external agencies to collect the data manually, and in-house.

The TCC executive director argued that the absence of a digital platform is responsible for the lack of data that lawmakers say is necessary for decision-making. Frett-Gregory, however, remained resolute. “We've had this very same conversation over and over. You did not walk away from the discussion, recognizing that, at minimum, you needed to start collecting that information.”

Following this latest appearance before the Legislature, the TCC remains under fire from lawmakers. According to Senator Milton Potter, the taxi sector is “too critical an industry for us to be at this standstill...There must be a way for us to fix this industry so that we can begin to make

some meaningful progress.” Finance-conscious lawmakers were also disgruntled about the agency’s continued dependence on appropriations from the central government to maintain operations. ?

It remains to be seen whether lawmakers will recommend the TCC’s requested budget of \$1,555,706.93 for FY2025, or appropriate a smaller sum as was previously done.

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