

logo not found or type unknown

Misdemeanor, Fines, and VIPD Impound Lot to Be Part of Abandoned Vehicles Law as Senators Prepare Tougher Measures

Senators to draft legislation aimed at tackling St. Thomas's abandoned vehicle crisis, introducing stricter penalties and responsibilities for vehicle owners

Senate / **Published On July 24, 2024 07:04 AM /**

Nelcia Charlemagne **July 24, 2024**

Image not found or type unknown



An abandoned vehicle. By. GETTY IMAGES

In less than two months since his appointment, St. Thomas's new interim administrator Kevin Rodriguez has been inundated with calls about abandoned vehicles across the island. However, he noted that addressing the issue is becoming increasingly challenging.

During the Office of the Governor's Budget hearing on Monday, Mr. Rodriguez shared examples of the issues he faces with members of the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance. He described a call from a woman in Bolongo, explaining that someone had cleared land and left over 35 abandoned vehicles there. "It appears they just dumped the cars on the property, but since it's private land, we are unable to intervene," he informed the lawmakers.

It's "a major issue," said Mr. Rodriguez to committee chair Senator Donna Frett-Gregory, who was the first to raise concerns over the sheer number of derelict vehicles in the St. Thomas community. She was assured by the administrator that "once we get a call, we tag the vehicle." However, they are often relegated to "playing cat and mouse." He testified that "once the person realizes it's tagged [they] move the vehicle somewhere else, so when the wrecker comes to pick up the vehicle, it's no longer there."?

To combat against this, "we're just trying our best to move them as quickly as possible," said Mr. Rodriguez. Despite his optimism, the governor's chief of staff Karl Knight did not share similar sentiments. "I've chastised all of the administrators. I don't feel it's the responsibility of the Office of the Governor to be the custodian of abandoned vehicles for the entire territory," he said. According to Mr. Knight, repeated efforts to address the issue have failed, creating the need to "focus more on a public education campaign." He suggested that collaborating with the Waste Management Authority would be ideal.?

For Mr. Knight, it should be the responsibility of the vehicle owner to dispose of their old vehicles. "Somebody else comes and cleans up the mess after the fact. We've been doing that for well over a decade, and the problem hasn't diminished," he lamented. Senator Frett-Gregory agreed, disclosing that she is currently working on legislation to "put some teeth in this abandoned vehicle thing." Though details of the draft legislation were not shared, she alluded to a push for accountability.?

"People need to feel this situation where it hurts. Not only in their pocket but perhaps it needs to become a misdemeanor," Senator Frett-Gregory suggested. "This situation is just grave for us." Mr. Knight welcomed the invitation to provide input on the draft bill.

Senator Kenneth Gittens shared similar reservations with Mr. Knight. "I too don't understand why we still have the administrator's office tasked with this," he shared. According to Mr. Gittens, the solution will include "fines and the establishment of the police impound lot." He suggested "going after the last registered owners" to put a stop to the abandoned vehicle issue.

?There was no indication of when Senator Frett-Gregory intends to introduce the legislation in question. The 35th Legislature is in the midst of the FY2025 budget cycle which has dominated legislative hearings for several weeks.