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## **BMV Addresses CDL Issue, TSA Recognition, and Digital Advancements at Budget Hearing**

**BMV addresses CDL program delays, TSA recognition of driver's licenses, digital advancements, and unregistered vehicles during Senate budget hearing; FY 2025 budget set at \$6 million with projected revenues of \$11.8 million**

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The V.I. Bureau of Motor Vehicles has been making strides in several areas, but there are still challenges to overcome. During a Senate Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance hearing on Wednesday, BMV Director Barbara Jackson McIntosh addressed various issues including the establishment of a Commercial Drivers License (CDL) program, recognition of USVI driver's licenses by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), and the bureau's digital transformation efforts.

One area of concern for the BMV is the implementation delays in establishing a CDL program in the territory. Ms. McIntosh explained that United States territories had been left out of legislation setting up the program across the nation. “The FMCSA thinks that it may have been an oversight,” Ms. McIntosh told lawmakers, referencing the Federal Motor Carrier Administration, the agency tasked with improving the safety of commercial motor vehicles nationwide. She says the FMCSA advised the VI BMV to establish their own CDL licensing regime while they await amendments in the federal legislation. “One advantage to us,” the BMV director said, “would be if a driver were to leave the Virgin Islands, and go to any of the mainland states, all they would have to do is take a test...because they would have already had the training.”

Another longstanding problem has also largely been solved, lawmakers learned. Virgin Islanders have previously had major difficulties in utilizing drivers licenses issued by the territory as identification for domestic travel. However, in answering a question from Senator Novelle Francis Jr., Ms. McIntosh noted that the problem was the result of the failure of the TSA to include previous versions of the VI drivers license in their database. “I know this may not be any consolation to us here in the Virgin Islands,” she acknowledged. “But we’re not unique.” Ms. McIntosh disclosed that apart from several U.S. territories not being included, “I was surprised that the last conference we went to a few months ago that there’s a state that’s not even in there,” she told Senator Francis.

Nevertheless, she reiterated that the territory’s new licenses – those issued from the latter half of 2022 onwards – should have no issues being accepted by the TSA. “If you are experiencing any issues, you can come back and get one for free,” Ms. McIntosh informed.

The agency’s digital transformation efforts also came in for praise during the hearing. “I must admit, when it comes to digitizing government, I give DMV an A+,” Senator Javan James Sr. declared at the end of his round of questioning. “Continue the great work that you’re doing.” Senator Samuel Carrion echoed these sentiments, saying, “You guys are at the forefront when it comes to digitalization and providing those online services,” and expressed hopes that other government departments and agencies will soon adopt a similar approach.

Another concern for the BMV is the “significant” number of unregistered vehicles currently traversing the territory’s roadways. “When I pulled this data in June, by June 30 we have 18,000 unregistered vehicles to the tune of \$1.5 million,” Ms. McIntosh disclosed. She says the Vehicle Identification Numbers, along with the owner’s name and address, are compiled and sent to the police on a monthly basis. The BMV director told lawmakers that submission of this information to the police does result in action from vehicle owners to regularize their status. Senator Donna Frett-Gregory noted that the situation has an impact on law enforcement’s crime-fighting abilities. “That is also tied to our inability to solve crimes in the territory,” the committee chair noted. “This needs to be something that we give serious attention to,” Frett-Gregory continued.

Ms. McIntosh noted that not all unregistered vehicles are being driven, however. “It could be too, that some of these vehicles are just parked up someplace – that person just decided that they’re not going to register or canceled their registration.” However, enforcement of registration is left to the police. “I think the time is right for us to have a deep dive conversation” into the issue of unregistered vehicles, stated Ms. Frett-Gregory, noting that the issue impacts the ongoing discussion about the proliferation of abandoned vehicles in the territory as well.

## **FY 2025 Budget and Future Plans**

For FY 2025, the BMV is contemplating total budgetary allocations of \$6,056,910. Approximately two-thirds of that sum, \$3,665,910, is expected to come from the general fund, \$1 million from the BMV fund, and \$1.4 million from the personalized License Plate Fund.

Revenues from the BMV are anticipated to reach over \$11.8 million, above this year's projected total revenue of \$11.1 million.

Unlike her counterparts at several other government entities, Ms. McIntosh is satisfied with her agency's proposed budget for FY 2025. "No Senator, I'm not," she said when questioned about whether she had any concerns regarding budgetary challenges for the bureau.

Ms. McIntosh enjoyed a generally pleasant hearing as lawmakers were pleased with the Bureau's performance over the last fiscal year. Several senators acknowledged the BMV's improvement when it comes to customer service. "I think it was excellent," said Senator Dwayne DeGraff, recounting his last experience at the Bureau. "I appreciate that."