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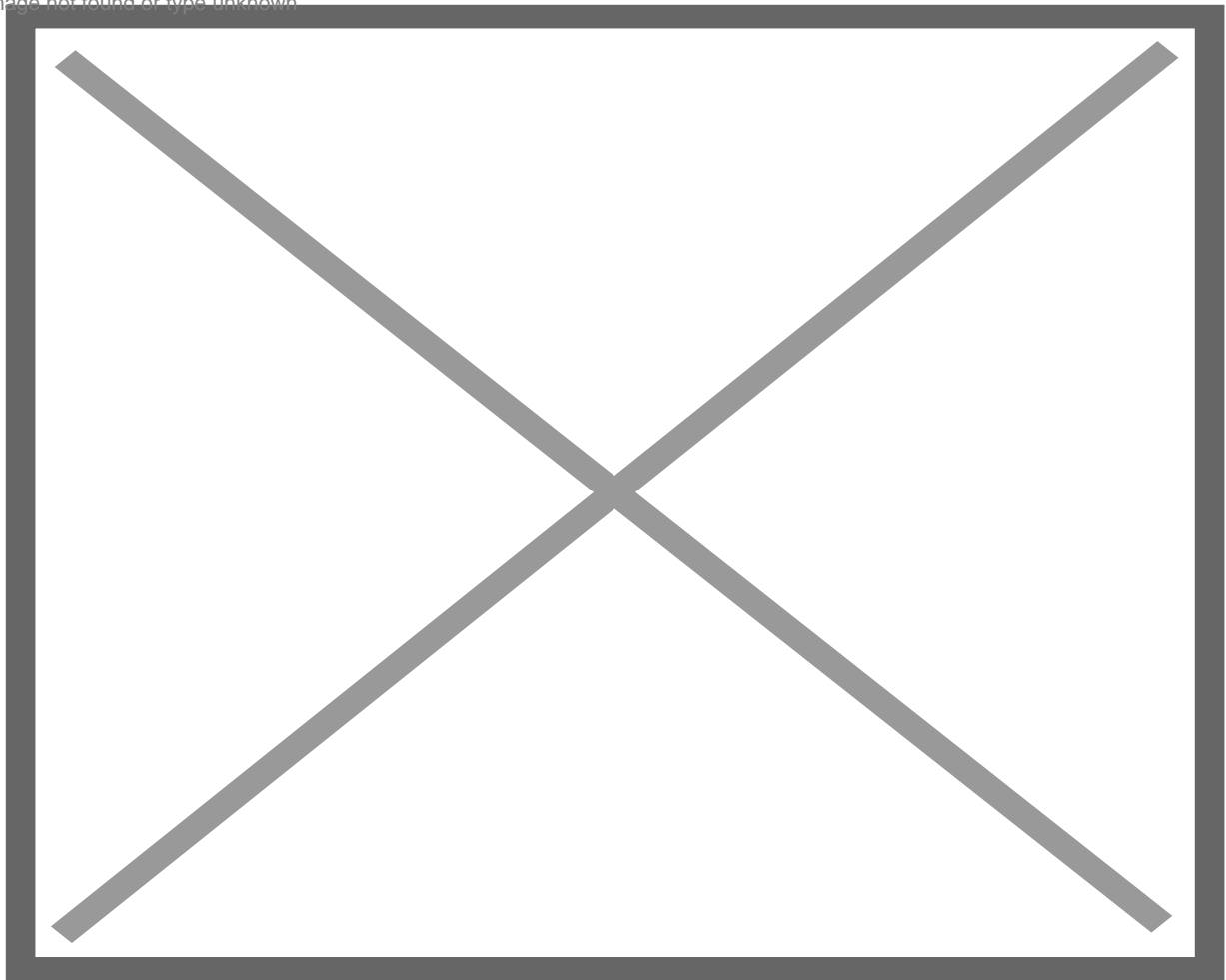
Julian Penn, Governor's Taxicab Commission Nominee Fails to Impress Legislators

Senators remain unconvinced by nominee's commitment and experience as Julian Penn attempts to secure position on the v.I. Taxicab commission

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Nelcia Charlemagne **August 23, 2024**

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Julian Penn. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

Despite Julian Penn's willingness to serve on the board of the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission, lawmakers were unconvinced that he possessed the necessary experience to help resolve the multitude of issues plaguing the utility.

Having worked in the taxi sector for over forty years, Mr. Penn attempted to assure lawmakers that he was up for the challenge. "I look forward to working with you to improve our Taxicab

services, as well as addressing our related issues such as customer services and hospitality,” he said in his testimony on Thursday.

The army veteran told Rules and Judiciary committee members that “it is very important to set a standard on the type of service we provide, as it would increase customer satisfaction as well as the likelihood of a returning customer.” He laid out a list of suggestions to bolster the services offered by taxi drivers, including “implementation of a zero smoking policy in vehicles used to transport passengers.” It’s a policy Mr. Penn believes will “eliminate potential [health] risk to customers.”

He also proposed restricting parking along the street between Emancipation Garden and the Grand Hotel in Charlotte Amalie during certain hours to reduce traffic congestion. Such a move would “increase efficiency by ensuring our customers get to their destinations in a timely manner,” Mr. Penn suggested. The board nominee believes it prudent to “implement a customer service and hospitality training program...to provide that cohesive, five-star service.” Additionally, he told senators that an individual wishing to become a taxi driver “should be a resident of the U.S Virgin Islands for at least five years consecutively...to get acclimated to society.”

Some legislators, like Senator Milton Potter, were impressed with Mr. Penn, particularly his suggestion to make taxi medallions more accessible to recent high school graduates who are “interested in pursuing a career of entrepreneurship as a taxi driver.” For Mr. Potter, the nominee made “very practical, sensible suggestions.” Other senators, though, were less convinced.

As evidenced in his testimony, Mr. Penn’s approach was geared toward improving the service provided by taxi drivers, and not necessarily the Taxicab Commission. The challenges at TCC have long concerned lawmakers. “There are a lot of issues right now in the Taxi Commission,” noted Sen. Franklin Johnson. “It’s going to require a lot of time to correct a lot of the ills that are there.” He repeatedly questioned whether Mr. Penn would be able to dedicate so much of himself. In a response that seemed not to move the lawmaker, Mr. Penn promised that “if it comes to a point where it is very demanding, I have no problem giving up taxi driving.”

Still, Senator Diane Capehart wanted him to “convince us that you will be prepared to roll up your sleeves, put in hours the time to make the necessary changes as a regulatory commission that oversees this industry.” Mr. Penn failed to convince Sen. Kenneth Gittens as well. “The nominee’s experience appears insufficient for addressing the complexities that we have here with our Taxicab Commission today,” he observed. He concluded that Mr. Penn was unable to “demonstrate clearly to me the understanding of the current issues facing this industry.”

Despite an unfavorable motion to consider Julian Penn as the governor’s nominee for the Taxicab Commission, his possible appointment will be considered in an upcoming Legislative Session.?

A [previous unfavorable recommendation](#) from the Rules Committee, that of Laura Nichols-Samms to the board of the Public Services Commission, was ultimately approved during a legislative session.