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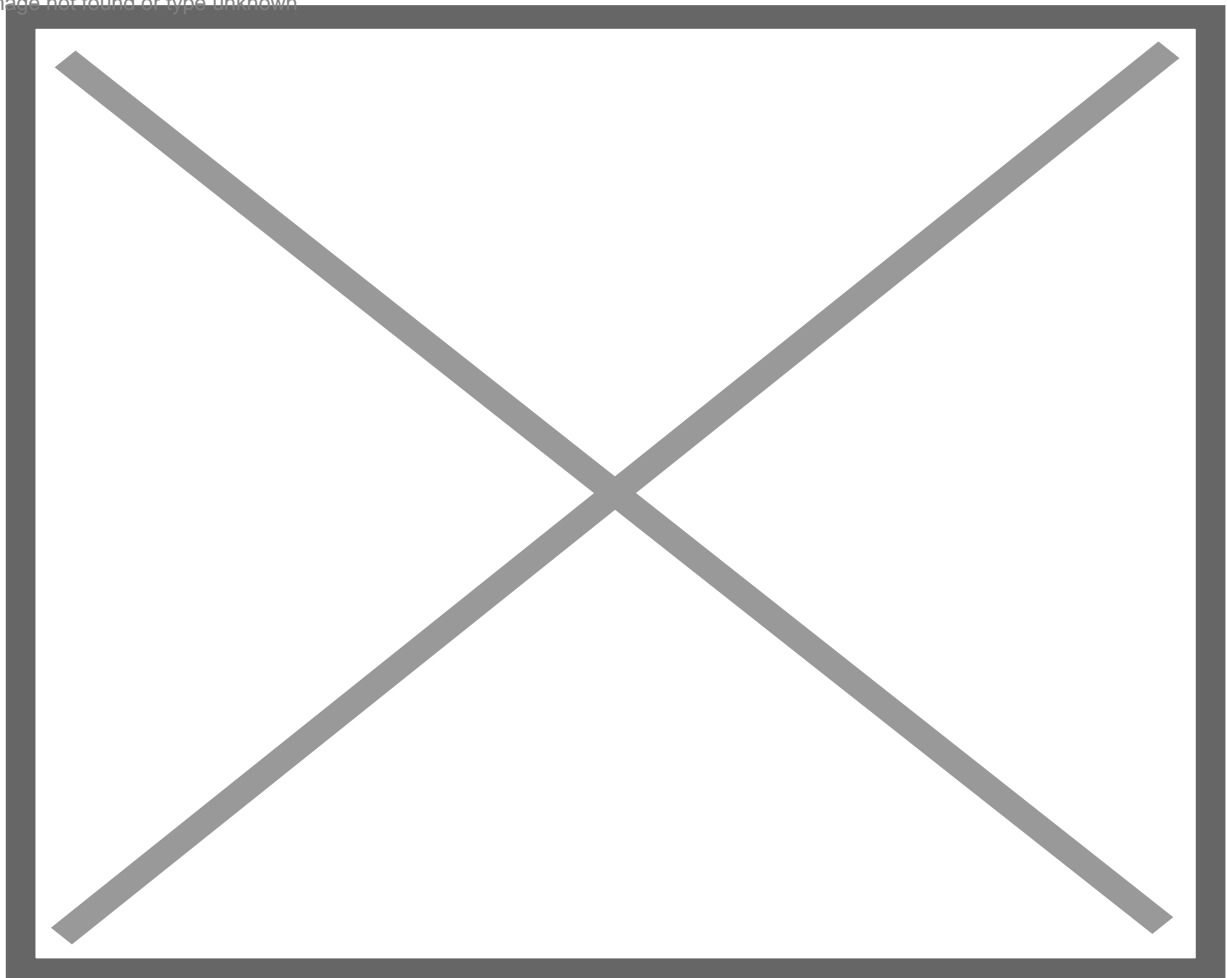
## Taxicab Commission Seeks \$1 Million Budget Boost Amid Zero Enforcement Officers and Rising Illegal Taxi Concerns

**The V.I. Taxicab Commission is asking for a \$1 million budget increase for FY 2026, citing an urgent need to hire enforcement staff and address illegal operators. Lawmakers questioned the lack of job postings and concrete action plans**

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Nelcia Charlemagne **May 31, 2025**

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**Taxis at the Cyril E. King Airport on April 30, 2023 at 1:39 p.m. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM.**

The Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission wants the legislature to increase its budget ceiling by almost a million dollars in the next financial year, TCC's acting executive director Melissa Smith

said on Friday. This would bring its total allocation to \$1.5 million, compared to the \$556,000 it currently manages.

When Ms. Smith shared that information with members of the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection, some responded with amusement. “I chuckled at your budgetary ceiling increase because you know that revenues are down,” committee member Senator Novelle Francis told Ms. Smith.

For the acting executive director, who replaced [Vernice Gumbs](#), additional funding is crucial to beef up the Commission’s enforcement capabilities. Following the retirement of their lone officer on Friday, TCC currently employs no personnel in an enforcement role. There are now six such vacancies at the Taxicab Commission. “My strategy would be to bring law enforcement leadership into the agency,” Ms. Smith said. In the meantime, she’s been liaising with the Virgin Islands Police Department and the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs for support in this area.

The lack of dedicated enforcement staff means that industry infractions and the age-old issue of illegal taxi operators are not being adequately addressed. Seven citations have been issued in 2025, but no penalties or fines have been collected. “We haven’t had the hearings,” offered Ms. Smith, without disclosing a timeframe in which they are expected to be held. “If you’re not doing collecting, how do we fulfill your obligations?” wondered Senator Franklin Johnson.

Johnson was especially interested in enforcement efforts on St. Croix as well as Ms. Smith’s interaction with taxi operators in that district. “I haven’t visited St. Croix yet due to budgetary constraints, and we’re working on addressing that shortly,” she told him.

Outside of the boots-on-the-ground brand of enforcement, the Taxicab Commission manages a formal complaint process that allows community members to file reports of relevant infractions. Ms. Smith told lawmakers that during her time at the helm thus far, there have been “no formal complaints.” That lack does not negate the fact that TCC is aware of illegal operations occurring territory-wide, however “we do stress the need for formal complaints,” Ms. Smith said. “Otherwise it’s hearsay.” TCC is willing to accept photos “that are sent to our officers so that it’s documented,” she offered.

Illegal taxi operations were a central part of Ms. Smith’s testimony. She described that issue as “increasingly urgent” and reminded the public that “operating illegal taxis in the U.S. Virgin Islands carries several legal implications.” “Operating without an authorized taxi license and badge is a violation of local law,” stated Ms. Smith.

Senator Alma Francis Heyliger adopted a solutions-oriented approach. “We talk about it a lot but we don’t talk about potential solutions,” she asserted. Ms. Smith, again, emphasized the need for enforcement personnel. She considers public information equally important. “Allowing users to become educated on what represents a legal and authorized operator is crucial and critical,” she told Ms. Francis Heyliger.

Despite the urgent need for enforcement personnel, lawmakers suggested that the Commission is dragging its feet. Ms. Smith informed Senator Kenneth Gittens that there are currently “no specific operations” initiated with VIPD to crack down on illegal activity in the industry. Nor was there a plan for implementing a communications campaign. “That is something that we intend to implement with a timeline forthcoming,” she told Mr. Gittens.

Committee chair Senator Avery Lewis also encouraged a greater sense of urgency. Despite the six enforcement vacancies discussed earlier, “I just went on Division of Personnel website and I don't see not one position posted or anything,” Senator Lewis told Ms. Smith. According to the acting executive director, she is currently in talks with the Office of Management and Budget “to have a strong handle on what I can actually afford, budgetary-wise, in terms of hiring.”

Ms. Smith was also unable to provide definitive updates on a timeline for conducting interviews. “I don't have a specific date because it involves multiple players and I can only give a projection,” she told Johnson. She anticipates “within the end of July through August.”

“The urgency is there, and it's active urgency because I've only been on board since February,” countered Ms. Smith to concerned lawmakers. She quantified the situation differently from Gittens, who maintained “nothing is really happening.”

With annual budget hearings fast approaching, the Taxicab Commission is preparing to justify its request for an additional million dollars in FY 2026. “The budget we have based barely allows us to hire staff and operate day to day,” Ms. Smith lamented.