

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Years After Promise, St. Croix Still Without Morgue as DOJ Returns to Controversial Toro Site

Over two years after DOJ promised a St. Croix morgue, delays persist. With autopsy transport costs to St. Thomas nearing \$2,000 per case, officials now plan to install the long-purchased modular unit at the Toro site by August—despite community concerns.

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Over two years since the V.I. Department of Justice promised a new morgue for the district of St. Croix, residents are still waiting while project dates continue to slip. Meanwhile, VIDOJ continues having to transport bodies to St. Thomas for autopsies, at significant cost.

Lawmakers were first told in 2022 that a modular facility could be in place by the end of that year. In February 2023, then acting Attorney General Carol Thomas-Jacobs told senators that the [morgue would be in place](#) by around May. Nineteen months later, Attorney General Gordon Rhea testified before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security, Justice, and Public Safety that the DOJ “will be able to [finally close this hole](#) within two months.”

During Wednesday's appearance before the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance to defend DOJ's FY2026 budget request, Mr. Rhea explained why there was still no morgue on St. Croix.

Preparatory works were completed at the site of the Toro building, in accordance with the initial plan. However due to “a variety of reasons, that was found to have problems,” Mr. Rhea reminded lawmakers. Plans shifted to using facilities at the Juan F. Luis Hospital, and a memorandum of understanding was signed to allow the Medical Examiner's Office to use those premises. However, Mr. Rhea noted that “the autopsy suite and morgue at the JFL hospital remains inoperable, rendering it useless.”

That has forced DOJ officials to revert to the original course of action. “We've shifted back to the Toro site, cleared that ground,” Mr. Rhea told lawmakers. “I brought to the island, Vesta, which is a company that knows all about mobile morgues, handles them all the time, and is going to oversee the work that's being done.” According to Mr. Rhea, a contract has “been worked out. Details are done. It needs just final approval from DPP, and then it will be a go,” he added, referring to the V.I. Department of Property and Procurement.

New projections are now that the modular morgue will be up at the Toro site around August. “I really do expect that we will be having it in place by the end of that month, or definitely by September,” the attorney general said.

Senator Franklin Johnson, however, was not pleased with the decision to revert to the Toro location, citing the “cry from the community.”

Mr. Rhea was aware. “I was informed by Government House that there had been some real opposition by some of the merchants in the area,” he told Mr. Johnson. It's why the DOJ also considered placing the modular unit at the old hospital site but “it turns out that the cost there was going to be extremely high.” The work already completed at the Toro site would have to be replicated there, he noted.

The attorney general promised that the facility would blend in with its surroundings. “We could do it in a way that would make this structure not look like a morgue. It would look like just another commercial building,” Mr. Rhea promised Senator Johnson, who remained unconvinced.

“If you take a pig and put lipstick and it is still going to be a pig,” the senator told the attorney general. “The business sector in the area don't feel it's an appropriate place...How do you think the customers going to feel?”

The eventual installation of the modular morgue, purchased in 2023 and currently in the care of the V.I. Port Authority, is expected to generate significant savings for the DOJ. In 2022, the [cost to transport a body](#) to St. Thomas for autopsy was said to be approaching

\$2000.

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