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Eight Years After Hurricanes, BMV Still in Trailers as Permanent Facility Plans Stall

Nearly a decade after the 2017 hurricanes, the Bureau of Motor Vehicles is still housed in temporary trailers on all three islands, as senators grow concerned over lack of funding, unrealistic construction quotes, and repeated site failures.

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The Bureau of Motor Vehicles, like several other government entities, continues to operate out of temporary facilities eight years after the 2017 hurricanes. The status of infrastructure improvements, therefore, was of particular interest when the BMV appeared before the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance to defend its FY2026 budget request.

There was no mention of major capital improvements in the testimony of its director, Barbara Jackson McIntosh, prompting the committee's chair, Senator Novelle Francis, to seek details.

"As everyone know, we're still in trailers. We really never received any monies to build a building on St. Croix," Ms. McIntosh replied. The Bureau is in receipt of funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency for "improvement of a building." However, McIntosh insists that "we can't improve. The building is done." A 7-year-old cost estimate prices the construction of a new building in St. Croix at \$3 million, Ms. McIntosh informed Sen. Francis.

Still, the BMV continues the search for a suitable home with the support of the Office of Disaster Recovery. "It's very difficult...We've been to seven different places. What we have found, the issue is either parking, ingress and egress," she explained.

Francis recalled a "proposal on the table to utilize the old Hovensa Training School as a facility," but according to Ms. McIntosh, that "fell through as well."

"The electrical was vandalized, severely vandalized, so now we have to basically start all over again," she noted. "There's a lot of old stuff in there that had to be redone all over again." BMV has deemed the cost of doing so "prohibitive."

"The complaint on St. Croix have really been location and sometimes the modular units not working the way they're supposed to," noted Senator Kurt Vialet. He was interested in the actual cost of rehabilitating the old Hovensa site.

According to Ms. McIntosh, a quote indicated that it will run the Bureau "almost \$8 million." Sen. Vialet was confused. "You had a quote to build a building for \$3 million, and a quote to refurbish a building for \$8 million. That one ain't make any sense at all," he told the director. He suggested that the BMV request an additional estimate from the Department of Public Works. "I can't [fathom] where they came up with that number. You didn't ask them to build a whole new building. I just think a number of individuals are being quite ridiculous."

Senator Hubert Frederick, pleased with the amount of revenue generated by the Bureau of Motor Vehicles, encouraged Ms. McIntosh to "lean on us" for support for a "permanent home."

The situation is apparently not much better on St. Thomas. Though BMV has money to rebuild at its old headquarters, the required demolition will severely impact business services. "The inspection lane is still there and we can't demolish with them there," she noted. BMV, therefore, is "actively looking for a relocation spot" on St. Thomas. "We thought we had a place up until a month ago, and that fell through," she stated.

The BMV's space at the Tutu Park Mall in St. Thomas costs the Bureau \$6,428 in rental costs monthly. That lease expires in June 2026. Understanding the need for the BMV's own space, Senator Marvin Blyden emphasized the importance of a central location. "Location is critical in terms of people getting to and from that area," he advised Ms. McIntosh, but agreed the current rent is "a little steep."

In St. John, the BMV also operates from a trailer. "Have we looked into any designs we could utilize? I know the footprint is small and there's a lot of congestion taking place there," observed Senator Angel Bolques Jr. "I'm sure that these are things that you think about every single day. But what are we going to do?" he asked of Ms. McIntosh. Outside of retrofitting the trailer, Bolques insisted that "in the long term, that facility also needs to be reconstructed."

Ms. McIntosh “totally agrees” and told the at-large senator that everything is possible with the appropriate funding.” When that funding would come and from where, however, remains to be seen.

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