

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Daughter of Retired Taxi Driver Delivers Powerful Plea for Safety and Reform at St. Thomas Town Hall

Rasheeda Francis, drawing on her father's decades in the industry, urged lawmakers to prioritize driver protection through GPS tracking, background checks, and stricter oversight of dollar taxis, earning strong applause from taxi operators.

Community Center / **Published On October 17, 2025 09:01 AM /**

Nelcia Charlemagne **October 17, 2025**



Rasheeda Francis, daughter of a retired taxi driver, speaks at a St. Thomas town hall urging lawmakers to improve driver safety, regulate dollar taxis, and require GPS tracking and background checks. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE.

Rasheeda Francis, the daughter of a retired taxi driver, was the first to speak at Wednesday's town hall meeting for St. Thomas taxi drivers, organized by the Committee on Culture, Youth, Aging, Sports and Parks.

Though she is not in the taxi business herself, Ms. Francis said that for decades, she has listened to her now-80-year-old father lament about the same shortcomings in the territory's transportation sector. Her father is not alone in this situation, as the public commentary on the need for advancement has been relatively constant over the years. In her comprehensive remarks, Ms. Francis presented several overarching areas of concern, complemented by potential solutions, to the 10 lawmakers who addressed the audience of taxi operators.

Chief among them was safety. "When my father decided to go full-time as a taxi driver, the main concern in our house was whether he was going to return home safe every evening," Ms. Francis said. She addressed a qualm expressed by Senator Kenneth Gittens regarding the absence of taxi services after dark. Ms. Francis noted that while younger taxi drivers may "take the risk," more seasoned operators remain mindful.

"There was a point in time in my life when taxi drivers were being attacked, and some of them was what we used to call being gun-butted," Ms. Francis stated, adding that even today, many drivers still do not feel entirely safe when faced with potential danger.

She was also concerned about potential racial ideologies that may accompany passengers who come to the territory from overseas. "Our country is in arms and racially motivated," Ms. Francis said. "We cannot continue to think that our taxi men, people dealing in this tourism industry, our churches and alike, are separate and apart from what is going on in the United States."

Ms. Francis also addressed comments that some taxi drivers are unwilling to transport local passengers. "At the end of the day, this is their business," she offered as a defense. She suggested that it may, again, be a matter of safety concerns. "We need to find out from them the why and solve that problem, instead of continuously trying to force a circle into a square," Ms. Francis advised.

One potential solution to security concerns could be to require that "some type of GPS technology" be installed on vehicles used for taxi services, alongside "some type of application to track and record their trips," offered Ms. Francis. Adoption of such technology is also a "safety measure for the driver."

GPS tracking can also provide insight into speeding and other inappropriate activity, she argued. "We continue to put the onus on the driver, and it's not being solved. It hasn't been solved since my dad was driving," Ms. Francis lamented. Now, she told lawmakers, it is time for a "new approach."

Another industry challenge that Ms. Francis believes needs to be approached from a novel perspective is the regularization of dollar taxis. She recalled a recent experience where some visitors voiced their apprehension about boarding an unmarked dollar taxi.

"We got dollar taxis coming out looking like they just roll out of bed, and all they're doing is rolling the window down halfway to get your money and give you a change," Ms. Francis stated. She believes that like traditional taxi drivers, this service should be

regulated by the Taxicab Commission.

“If they're not VITRAN, they need to be under the Commission,” she asserted. “If it cannot be regulated that way, then I suggest that the dollar vans go under VITRAN and be made to become subcontractors of VITRAN.”

Ms. Francis also observed that several dollar taxi operators appear unfamiliar with the island's roadways, noting that they are not currently required to take the instructional courses provided by the Taxicab Commission. She recommended that “everyone operating a passenger vehicle should complete these classes and become better acquainted with our communities.

She also expressed frustration with the passenger safety aspect of dollar vans, as many know them. “I know that there have been people ejected out of dollar vans because of the speed and the rate they're going,” Ms. Francis said. “We don't have a school bus system that can accommodate all of our children, so we have to put things in place so that these children are safe in these vehicles,” she pleaded with authorities.

Background checks for those providing transportation services were another recommendation from Ms. Francis. Her remarks were followed by a resounding round of applause from the room of taxi drivers, and equal commendation from government representatives.

“I think you hit it right on the head,” said Elizabeth Hansen-Watley, assistant commissioner in the Department of Tourism and chair of the Taxicab Commission's board. “The way we're going to improve is to be honest about the things we need to improve on,” she said.

Ms. Hansen-Watley concurred that safety remains a major concern. She praised Ms. Francis's “good suggestions” about GPS trackers and has invited her to a further conversation with the Taxicab Commission and Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs.

“Everybody seems to be in agreement that safety is not just a big concern, it's a necessity to address,” noted Ms. Hansen-Watley. “It's a community problem. It's not just a taxi driver problem.”