

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Senate Democrats Looking To Purchase \$5.9 Million Innovative Building As Replacement For St. Croix Legislature

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ST. CROIX -- Senate Democrats recently toured the Innovative Communications Corporation building, located at 7G & 7H Estate Diamond here, and are looking to acquire the modern facility as the new location of the Fritz E. Lawaetz Legislative Complex, currently located in Frederiksted, according to information gleaned from [a letter](#) Sen. Nereida "Nelly" Rivera-O'Reilly wrote to Senate President Neville James on Wednesday.

The Consortium broke the news of the [facility's sale](#), being managed through Chris Hanley Realty of Sotheby's International for \$5.9 million. The sale is part of Rural Telephone Finance Cooperative's liquidation of Innovative Communications Corporation (ICC) assets. Just yesterday, The Consortium revealed that ICC plans on terminating -- [one way or the other](#) -- 80 employees as it gets ready to be acquired.

But Sen. Rivera-O'Reilly, in the letter addressed to James, asked that the building be purchased and used as a government-owned mental health facility instead. She highlighted the needs of those mentally ill in the community as reason enough for a dedicated facility, and revealed that her office and other stakeholders have met with the principles of the fancy space "to ensure complete buy-in."

To consider spending millions of dollars to relocate the St. Croix legislature is simply appalling and a slap in the face to our constituents. - Sen. Nereida "Nelly" Rivera-O'Reilly.

"The needs of the mentally ill are serious and pressing and this bill (referring to a measure introduced in May, 2015, authorizing the Dept. of Property and Procurement to negotiate for and purchase the facility) seeks to finally address the longstanding issues."

According to a 2011 Inspector General audit, funds were expended to renovate the legislative buildings -- including the Lawaetz Legislative Complex -- during the 28th Legislature, when the Senate, according to the IG report, mismanaged some \$6.9 million of taxpayers money.

Furthermore, Sen. O'Reilly says the need for a mental health facility is more pressing than that of a new lawmaking building, and reminded James of Governor Kenneth Mapp's stated commitment to residents with such problems.

"The governor, in his State or the Territory, highlighted his commitment to address mental illness," Rivera-O'Reilly said. "The Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services also held a hearing to discuss the status of mental illness, with members agreeing to take immediate action."

Rivera-O'Reilly added that the recent move by Senate Democrats to tour the facility with plans of an acquisition demonstrates "a total disregard of the preemption rules of the legislation."

She concluded: "The people of the territory expect us to create jobs and to pass legislation that will positively impact and cure our societal ills. To consider spending millions of dollars to relocate the St. Croix legislature is simply appalling and a slap in the face to our constituents."

Feature Image: Exterior of Innovative building.

Image Credit: Chris Hanley.