

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Hospital Board Vice Chair Says Morgue Incident Was Isolated. 'It Will Not Happen Again,' He Said

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ST. CROIX -- Troy de Chabert-Schuster, who serves as the vice chairman of the Juan F. Luis Hospital Board of Directors, told The Consortium late Wednesday that an incident that occurred at the morgue located at the hospital, which saw family members being forced to identify their deceased loved one outside the facility near dumpsters, was isolated. He also apologized and vowed that it would not be repeated.

"We did do our investigation and everything is under control," he said. "It will not happen again."

However, while Senator Alicia Hansen, who brought the matter to light, said there were several occurrences, Mr. deChabert-Schuster said the hospital's internal investigation revealed only one incident. "All that we can see it was an isolated event," he said. Mr. deChabert-Schuster said Richard Evangelista, J.F.L.'s acting CEO, would soon be inviting media houses for a press conference to address the matter.

Senator Alicia Hansen, who brought the matter to light during a press conference on Wednesday, said she was given permission to reveal at least one incident where family members were forced to identify their deceased outside the morgue. According to the senator, family members of a woman who was [killed by a fast-moving vehicle in July](#), identified the victim's body in the dark with a flashlight. She refused to reveal the other incidents out of respect for the families.

But while the hospital has received the full share of the blame, the morgue is not under the control of J.F.L.; it falls under the Department of Justice, and according to a veritable hospital source, J.F.L. officials have long sought the removal of the morgue from the hospital and back to the Charles Harwood Complex in Richmond (Dept. of Health on St. Croix), where it once was.

Even so, the idea that family members have been forced to identify their loved ones outside the morgue, in the dark of night near dumpsters, has roiled the St. Croix community.

"Rolling out a deceased body to be identified outside of the hospital in the dark, there's no excuse that anyone can give me" for not giving the family the respect that they deserve, Mrs. Hansen said.

During a July 28 Senate hearing, Mrs. Hansen said she queried Mr. Evangelista and Mr. deChabert-Schuster for information on the matter. According to Mrs. Hansen, both Mr. Evangelista and Mr. deChabert-Schuster said they were not aware of the occurrences.

The senator said she pressed Mr. Evangelista for answers on why the situation had taken place under his leadership, but he insisted that he did not know, she said. The lawmaker added that Mr. deChabert-Schuster expressed great empathy and apologized on behalf of the board, while Mr. Evangelista cast blame on the Department of Justice.

"The people of St. Croix deserve to go through the process of identification in a dignified manner; they should not have to endure additional pain by those who are in place to serve them," the veteran senator protested.