

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Hansen, Juan Luis Hospital, Give Contradicting Statements On Morgue Incident

Health / **Published On August 26, 2017 12:16 PM /**

Staff **August 26, 2017**



ST. CROIX -- The acting CEO of the Juan F. Luis Hospital and Medical Center, Richard Evangelista, on Thursday issued a release relative to news reports surrounding the process of identifying bodies at the morgue, which was brought to the fore during a press conference held by Senator Alicia Hansen on Wednesday.

In his response, Mr. Evangelista said while there was indeed an instance where family members identified a deceased loved one outside the morgue, he insisted that the incident was isolated, and did not play out how Mrs. Hansen explained.

"We are disheartened by the circumstances under which a family was allowed to identify their deceased loved one's body, and we sincerely apologize. JFL investigated the matter when we first learned of it at a July 28, 2017 Senate hearing, and the community needs to rest assured that this was an isolated incident and not one that occurred on more than one occasion as was reported," Mr. Evangelista said.

The Consortium made contact with Mrs. Hansen late Thursday for a response, as the lawmaker had previously said that she knew of several occurrences where families were forced to identify their deceased outside the morgue, near the dumpsters. On Thursday, she reiterated her stance.

[View the original embedded media](#)

"There was more than one incident," Mrs. Hansen reiterated. She said hospital officials were most likely referring to one incident because she was able to give details about it, which she released after being given authorization by family members.

Mrs. Hansen said she also received word from the Dept. of Justice, whose officials she said pinned blame on the hospital, while the hospital was attempting to cast blame on D.O.J. "I believe the committee of jurisdiction should call everyone in and try to resolve this issue," Mrs. Hansen said, referring to the Senate Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services.

The senator's statements are in direct conflict with information provided in J.F.L.'s latest release, however, which included details from a D.O.J. report explaining the findings. Mrs. Hansen based the premise of her press conference on a family whose members were pained after being told that the viewing of their loved one's body was to be done outside the morgue, with a flashlight in the dead of night.

Details from the apparent D.O.J. report tells a completely different story.

"We received a full report from the Department of Justice's Office of the Medical Examiner relative to the incident in question. According to the report, the body was under the jurisdiction of the DOJ when the family member viewed the body. The Medical Examiner had picked up the deceased from an accident scene and was transporting the deceased to the morgue for preparation. While the medical examiner was unloading the body, a number of Virgin Islands Police Department vehicles drove into the restricted area, one of them carrying the mother of the deceased, and demanded the mother see the body. The police officers were repeatedly advised by the DOJ staff that it was not appropriate to view the body at that time, but the VIPD officers still insisted. To avoid further confrontation, the decision was made by DOJ staff to allow the mother to identify the body at the rear of the morgue on the hospital's loading dock. At no point was the deceased in the morgue or removed from the morgue, to be viewed on the dock," said Mr. Evangelista.

He added, "Please note that it is not the practice or policy of JFL or the DOJ to allow identification of a deceased person outside. To ensure that there is no misunderstanding relative to viewing a body for identification purposes, I issued a memo to JFL's laboratory and morgue staff on August 1, 2017 advising that identification is to take place in a designated area of the morgue."

Mrs. Hansen did confirm that after bringing the incident to light, J.F.L. officials informed her in writing that an area within the hospital had been designated for identification of family members. Even so, the stories relayed by the hospital and Mrs. Hansen are far and wide apart, and leaves in doubt what really occurred, and how many times it actually did.

Feature Image: At the back of the Juan F. Luis Hospital, where Mrs. Hansen says families were being forced to identify deceased family members.

© Viconsortium 2026