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Gittens Says Reported Improper Disciplinary Action at VITEMA Impacted 911 Call Center, Not Only Covid-19

Government / **Published On January 11, 2022 08:41 AM /**

Staff Consortium **January 11, 2022**

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Senator Kenneth Gittens has expressed concerns about the need to bring in additional 911 operators from Ohio.

“Last week I communicated with the governor’s office about reported improper disciplinary actions within VITEMA and 911 dispatch in particular,” the senator said. “Just a few days later I learned, first through social media, that ten 911 operators had been brought in from Ohio to assist us here in the territory. We must, of course, guarantee that all calls to 911 are answered, but there is a larger issue in play in terms of ensuring the Virgin Islands Government is doing its part to attract, maintain and retain properly trained local employees. I am also very concerned about the cost of bringing in personnel from outside the territory.”

At least ten 911 operators have been brought in from Ohio to assist in covering emergency calls in both St. Croix and the St. Thomas-St. John Districts given the number of local operators impacted by Covid-19.

“This is a proactive move on the part of our government and I certainly appreciate the personnel from Ohio that are willing to lend a hand. However, coronavirus is not the only issue,” Mr. Gittens stated. “We also have local operators who have been suspended without due process and others who have left the job because of ongoing morale concerns.”

The senator said that those from outside the territory may be well-trained, but can never truly replace a locally based 911 operator because of their knowledge of the community.

“Most people that call 911 are under a degree of stress and may have a hard time providing important details and directions or expressing themselves clearly,” he said. “Those intimately familiar with the Territory are much better prepared to serve in this critical capacity.”