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DHS Blasted For 'Insulting' Testimony, Lack of Responses; Committee Considering Calling Department to Monthly Hearings

Government / **Published On February 10, 2022 06:03 AM /**

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Senate President Donna Frett-Gregory and Wed. Feb. 9 2022 demanded accountability from the V.I. Dept. of Human Services. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

Disappointed by the lack of answers for questions raised by members of the Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services during a Wednesday hearing, Senator Donna Frett-Gregory has recommended that the chairman organize monthly meetings until the management team of the Dept. of Human Services can provide better responses.

“I am going to ask the chair that until Human Services can get their act together, they need to come here every month. They need to come here every single month because the issues that are

occurring in Human Services are very telling on the social issues that we have in these U.S. Virgin Islands,” Ms. Frett-Gregory asserted after D.H.S. Commissioner Kimberley Causey-Gomez failed to directly answer questions following her testimony on the "Overview of the V.I. Department of Human Services".

“This discussion that we are having today is absolutely troubling...We come here for an update today and a simple question of how many social workers do you have, [yet] you have to go look in your computers,” Ms. Frett-Gregory lashed out to the commissioner and members of her team.

The senator said such information should be known to Ms. Causey-Gomez and her team as managing social workers and similar tasks are daily routines. "It is not only what is in your budget, it is what your need is or what your needs are. This has to stop, this is not funny," she assailed.

Ms. Frett-Gregory continued to chide the D.H.S. commissioner, asserting that her testimony was not comprehensive and that what was provided was "insulting to me." She said lawmakers requested an "overview," which the commissioner failed to provide.

“We asked for an update; we want to know how you're doing. What we want to know, commissioner, is how are things working in the Department of Human Services and you neglected to do that, so we're going to ask that you come back because we do not have enough time to have this discussion,” Ms. Frett-Gregory said.

Supporting her other colleagues who had already expressed frustration with the lack of clear or direct answers, the Senate president told Ms. Causey-Gomez that lawmakers were annoyed and upset because both the testimony and the subsequent answers provided did not offer any form of clarity.

“If we appear frustrated is because we are, the people are calling us... When you come before us and you give us a testimony in this manner, I am not sure what you expect us to do with it,” she said while emphasizing the need for specific details for the next meeting.

“They need to come here every month ...this is not a joking matter, this is serious business, people’s lives are being impacted daily while we walk around here in our stiletto [heels] and our nice suits, our nice dresses, and our pants,” Ms. Frett-Gregory stated while directly speaking to Sen. Novelle Francis who is the chairman of the committee.

Senator Alma Francis-Heyliger described the hearing as causing disarray in her mind after listening to the responses and the back and forth. “That really saddens me today because I am hurt for the people that need your services," she said. "We are here talking about one aspect – homelessness — but I am thinking about the foster care, the seniors, people that have come to Human Services, molestation, everything just started to cover my mind, and I am saying that if this is the chaos we are dealing with, for us to speak about homelessness, I am frightened, I am genuinely frightened,” she said.

Senator Novelle Francis told the Consortium Wednesday morning that his committee will send pertinent questions to D.H.S., and if the department is unable to provide clear responses to those questions, they would continue to be called to hearings.