

The Virgin Islands Consortium

DOJ Sends St. Croix's Dead to St. Thomas For Autopsies, Costing Gov't Over \$100,000 For Transportation and Examination

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The V.I. Dept. of Justice, because it currently lacks a functioning morgue facility on St. Croix, has been sending the bodies of the deceased from that island to St. Thomas, leading to over \$100,000 in additional costs to taxpayers.

Acting V.I. D.O.J. Attorney General Carol Thomas-Jacobs, responding to Senator Dwayne DeGraff during a Senate hearing Tuesday, told lawmakers that it has been a "costly" operation transporting bodies of the deceased on St. Croix to St. Thomas to perform autopsies.

"We are working to resolve that situation and that's why we're working to get the modular facility in place," she said before revealing that from July 2022 to present, "there's been a total of 23 persons, a total of 14 flights" from St. Croix to St. Thomas and back, which has cost the government \$32,000, while the cost for the medical examiner whose services are utilized when needed has totaled \$69,000.

The combined sum of \$101,000 in six months because the V.I. D.O.J. lacks a functioning morgue on St. Croix, along with the lack of sufficient medical examiners on staff, startled Mr. DeGraff, who simply responded, "wow."

According to Ms. Thomas-Jacobs, since July 2022, "all persons who died on St. Croix and who the Medical Examiner determined that an autopsy was necessary, were transported via chartered flight to St. Thomas so that the autopsy can be performed in the St. Thomas Medical Examiner facility."

She added, "After the autopsy is performed, the body is returned to St. Croix and turned over to the family. This process is generally a 24-hour turnaround. To date (from July 2022 to present), 23 persons who died in St. Croix were transported to St. Thomas to be autopsied."

The St. Croix Morgue status update follows investigative reporting by the V.I. Consortium that exposed [unbelievable, horror-movie conditions](#) at the St. Croix morgue back in July 2022, which led the medical examiner on St. Croix at the time, Dr. Jacqueline Pender, to tender her resignation.

Dr. Pender, who in mid-June 2022 had written the V.I. Dept. of Justice to ask that her contract be terminated on the 24th of that month, said in her resignation letter that for years she had been begging authorities at the V.I. D.O.J., under whose authority the Medical Examiner's Office falls, for the basic tools and equipment she needed to do her job. Since 2016, when Dr. Pender began performing autopsies on St. Croix, she says conditions deteriorated to a point where things became absolutely untenable, leaving her no choice but to quit.