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## V.I. Taxi Industry Struggles Amid Taxicab Commission Office Closure; Senators Convene Urgent Meeting

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An urgent meeting has been convened to discuss a way forward for the territory's taxi industry.

On Thursday this week, Senator Angel Bolques Jr. raised the alarm about operations at the Virgin Island Taxicab Commission, expressing disappointment that the commission's offices have apparently been closed for an extended period of time.

The commission first issued a public notice on March 21 that its St. Thomas office, in the Property & Procurement Building at 8201 Subbase would be temporarily closed due to "environmental concerns", until the issues are addressed. Numbers were provided for the commission's Chair Loretta Lloyd and the organization's secretary, as well as for the commission's St. Croix office for service in the interim.

A similar notice was circulated on April 24, this time informing drivers of the documents required to complete vehicle inspections, and offering to waive any penalties incurred for the months of March, April, “and if necessary, May.”

However, according to information Mr. Bolques says he has received from taxi operators, any arrangements that have been put in place by the commission are woefully inadequate. “Employees are working from home and are unreachable or cannot provide the required service,” Mr. Bolques says he was told.

The lawmaker said he was baffled as to why the commission’s Executive Director Vernice Gumbs had not implemented the kind of e-government protocols that have become standard during the pandemic, or sought to work with other “government departments, agencies, boards and commissions” to find shared space to work out of in the interim.

“The fact that drivers cannot work legally because they cannot access services is unacceptable,” said Mr. Bolques. “The entire commission is responsible for this lapse in management, execution, customer service, and overall interest in assisting them.”

Mr. Bolques noted that for many taxi operators, this work was their main or only source of income.

He said that he himself had tried to contact the commission several times without success. Consortium journalists have also tried, and failed, to contact the commission at the numbers provided.

On Friday, an announcement from the office of Senator Donna Frett-Gregory announced that she, alongside Mr. Bolques, would convene a meeting of industry stakeholders, taxi operators, representatives of various taxi associations in the territory, as well Ms. Gumbs and Ms. Lloyd, the commission’s executive director and board chair respectively.

The meeting will take place on May 8 in the Legislature’s conference rooms on both St. Thomas and St. Croix.