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Bryan Urged to Take Action on Taxi Cab Commission Board as Senators Hear Complaints, See Challenges

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After a contentious meeting on Monday with stakeholders in the taxi industry, Senator Angel Bolques says he and his colleagues are ready to take the next steps in resolving recent and longstanding complaints about the management and governance of the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission. Poor stewardship of the organization, detractors claim, have led to [chronic and critical dysfunction](#) in the commission.

At the meeting, convened jointly by Mr. Bolques's office and that of Senator Donna Frett-Gregory, Taxi Commission Executive Director Vernice Gumbs came in for heavy criticism due to the disruption caused by the closure of the commission's office in March due to air quality concerns. The keys to the premises had been returned to the Department of Property and Procurement, Ms. Gumbs said, and thus commission staffers had no access to the paper files on

which they relied for record-keeping. As such, tax operators cannot renew licenses or register for new vehicles, a predicament some driver's say has put them on the edge of a financial precipice.

On Tuesday, Mr. Bolques told Consortium journalists that he visited the facility to assess the situation for himself. "Executive Director Gumbs was there, and she opened up the facility to me. I was able to see first-hand a number of challenges that they are faced with so I can understand why she had to close down."

Ms. Gumbs had explained at Monday's meeting that the office's closure meant that staff had no access to the commission's paper filing system. Sen. Bolques confirmed this during his visit to the office, saying the situation needs to be urgently addressed. "Unfortunately, the Taxicab Commission does not have the adequate amount of technology to be able to operate...we really, really need to digitize that entity."

Regarding the commission's immediate future, Mr. Bolques said Ms. Gumbs is currently "going through the mold mitigation procedure with the company that Property & Procurement have hired to deal with that process." He was led to understand that this work would be concluded by the end of this week, noting that the task was not without its challenges.

Even aside from the immediate issues brought on by the offices of the commission being closed since March, other concerns aired during Monday's meeting must all be addressed, said Mr. Bolques.

"There are board members who have expired terms, we need new board members to be appointed...we haven't seen a set of by-laws from the commission," the senator stated. To begin to address this issue, Mr. Bolques said, Governor Albert Bryan has to act.

Mr. Bolques told Consortium journalists that following Monday's meeting, he and Senator Frett-Gregory wrote jointly to the governor requesting his immediate attention to the matter. The letter addressed "a number of issues and challenges and concerns that we found out about in that meeting...we're basically calling on the governor, respectfully of course, to appoint new members," he said.

"It's really imperative on the governor now, to either send their names back if he chooses to reappoint them for whatever reason or send new board members," Mr. Bolques added, referencing the Senate's role in confirming nominees to head various bodies.

Although board members could be re-appointed, Sen. Bolques said that Monday's meeting made it clear that stakeholders across the industry believe that a clean slate is needed at the head of the Taxicab Commission. Some pointed out that no board member even showed up to the meeting at the beginning of the week.

"The posture of the taxi drivers," said Mr. Bolques, "they feel that those board members have to go. That's not Angel Bolques saying that, that's the taxi drivers."

Ms. Frett-Gregory had reportedly expressed similar sentiments during the meeting, calling for the current board to be dismantled.

Meanwhile, the major issue of the commission's outdated record-keeping system is one which the Legislature will have to approach with care and caution, according to Mr. Bolques. "I believe that it is important for us to help the commission establish their digital footprint, whether it's an appropriation through the legislative process specifically to establish a digital footprint...I believe

my colleagues see the importance of this, in this critical area of what would otherwise be known as the forefront of tourism.”

Any such appropriation would be restricted for use only to facilitate the commission being able to provide services online. Referencing the previous discovery by lawmakers that the commission’s [accounting was in shambles](#), Sen. Bolques expressed utmost confidence that during upcoming budget hearings Finance Committee Chair Donna Frett-Gregory will “drill down on some of those dysfunctional practices...that the Taxicab Commission has had in the past, because we gotta clean it up.”

The Commission had previously been [raked over the coals](#) by lawmakers for alleged incompetent accounting practices leading the organization to be unable to account, during last year’s budget hearings, for the majority of their operating revenue from the previous fiscal year. In July of 2021, the commission’s board was [excoriated](#) by senators for paying itself up to \$125 per meeting, of which there were often multiple in a single day.

Lawmakers also agreed to investigate how and why a 1963 cap of 27 passengers on so-called “safari buses” — large open-backed vans used to transport people on sight-seeing trips — had been reduced to 20. Mr. Bolques decried the reduction of the maximum number of passengers, saying that insurance companies would be willing to accept a cap of at least 25 passengers. “The legislators who were involved in that meeting on the 8th, we have taken it upon ourselves to do the required research to find out why exactly it was changed to 20.”

The senator argued that a smaller cap was inefficient and ineffective, especially given the huge jump in tourism arrivals in the last 60 years.