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Taxicab Commission Budget Hearing Canceled Again as Board Leaves Voiceless Executive Director On Her Own

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V.I. Taxicab Commission Executive Director Vernice Gumbs. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

Conflicting prior appointments left the chair, vice-chair, and secretary of the VI Taxicab Commission Board unable to attend Thursday's meeting of the Senate Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance, Executive Director Vernice Gumbs told lawmakers.

Sitting alone in the well of the Earle B. Ottley Legislative Chambers on St. Thomas, Ms. Gumbs, her voice diminished to a hoarse whisper due to chronic medical issues, explained to committee chair Senator Donna Frett-Gregory that she had been depending on the support of her board to help her deliver the 7-page written testimony that had been prepared, and to answer subsequent

questions from committee members.

“I spoke with the chair, and she informed me that she had a prior appointment that was conflicting with today,” Ms. Gumbs told Sen. Frett-Gregory. “And I know the secretary who accompanied me at the last hearing, she had a scheduled appointment for today. I know that the vice-chair reported to the chairperson that she would not be able to attend today,” Ms. Gumbs explained.

At the last meeting just over two weeks ago, despite the presence of Board Chair Loretta Lloyd and Board Secretary Myrna George, Ms. Frett-Gregory decided to [cancel the session](#) due to technical challenges and the late submission of information from VITCC. “We are going to adjourn this meeting until such time as the Taxicab Commission can get their act together,” Sen. Frett-Gregory decided at the time. “I’m just not that chair.”

The commission has had a rocky relationship with lawmakers for quite some time. In August 2022, during the budget cycle for fiscal year 2023, after learning that the commission was unable to account for the majority of its proceeds, then-chair of the Finance Committee Kurt Vialet [suggested](#) that an Inspector General audit would be necessary to figure out what was going on with the Commission’s financials, a position that was supported by Ms. Gumbs as well as current committee chair Frett-Gregory.

“We have to have an audit of this because I don’t know if we realize what’s happening, but there’s a whole cloud of frustration because we’re having a circular conversation around the Taxicab Commission,” remarked Frett-Gregory at the time.

A year onwards, a true picture of the finances of the commission still proves elusive, as the Inspector General has yet to scrutinize the affairs of VITCC. After learning on Thursday that Ms. Gumbs was alone and still suffering from her medical condition, Ms. Frett-Gregory asked the VITCC executive director to make a decision about the trajectory of the meeting.

“I would not be able to continue with this in its entirety – to present my testimony and respond to questions,” said Ms. Gumbs.

“It’s always something,” retorted Sen. Frett-Gregory, saying that she would ask the Department of Finance to provide the Legislature with an updated balance for the Taxi Licensure Fund. As based on the figures presented before the budget committee, that fund seems to be over \$270,000 in the negative. “I’ve made it abundantly clear that these fund balances that are reflecting red balances, we will not be budgeting from them,” the senator declared. “It is irresponsible for us as legislators to do that.”

Before adjourning Thursday’s hearing, Ms. Frett-Gregory announced that perhaps it was time for lawmakers to meet with Governor Albert Bryan about the ongoing dysfunction within VITCC at the operational and the board levels. “We are at our wit’s end with the Taxicab Commission and the fact that they see no problem sending Ms. Gumbs down here knowing she has a challenge,” said Ms. Frett-Gregory. “We can’t keep doing this.”