

logo not found or type unknown

Floor Collapse in Bureau of Motor Vehicles Trailer Raises Concerns Over Employees' Safety

Government / **Published On August 10, 2023 06:02 AM /**

Janeka Simon and Ernice Gilbert **August 10, 2023**

Image not found or type unknown



The floor at a Bureau of Motor Vehicles on St. Croix collapsed Wednesday, Aug. 9 after an employee fell.

An employee of the Bureau of Motor Vehicles was hospitalized on Wednesday after falling and creating a hole in the floor of one of the trailers the bureau is using as office space.

The incident occurred just days after the workers returned from a two-day sickout last week during which they were [protesting](#) the working conditions at these trailers, saying they were plagued with numerous health and safety issues including water leaks, mold, termite infestations, and unsafe flooring, among other problems.

During the protest last Friday, worker representative Nicole Plante told Consortium journalists, "In some areas, you have to tiptoe because the ground is sinking in."

Now that the floor in one of the trailers has indeed collapsed, lawmakers are calling for urgent action to be taken to protect the health and safety of these government employees, and are urging their unions to advocate more effectively on their members' behalf.

Senators Kenneth Gittens and Franklin Johnson visited the St. Croix BMV location on Wednesday, with Mr. Gittens reporting that he was "deeply bothered" by the situation. He expressed disappointment that the employees were seemingly forced back inside these "dangerous and unsafe" trailers that were meant to serve as temporary accommodation when they were first introduced almost six years ago.

Mr. Gittens emphasized to BMV employees that, should conditions inside the trailer pose serious risks, they have a legal right to refuse work there. He also expressed concerns about potential legal repercussions for the Government of the Virgin Islands if the situation continues.

No representative from either the Bureau of Motor Vehicles or Government House has addressed the employees' complaints, protest, or recent injury.

A union representative told the Consortium Wednesday that employees were forced back to work following a threat of a temporary restraining order by the V.I. government, along with possible termination. He said the union representing the employees was essentially intimidated into ordering employees back to work.

Mr. Gittens said he discussed the conditions at the BMV on St. Croix with Governor Albert Bryan last week. He was informed that measures were in place to assist the employees. However, the senator expressed surprise upon discovering that the government had compelled the employees to return to the deteriorating buildings.

Senator Johnson pointed out that when BMV employees in St. Thomas encountered similar conditions, they were quickly relocated to an appropriate facility. He expressed his desire for St. Croix employees to receive the same consideration.

Mr. Gittens said the Bryan administration informed him last week that some locations were being considered; however, no final decision had been made. Even so, the senator stressed that these employees should be allowed to work from home in the meantime, suggesting that vehicle registrations could be mailed out to residents.