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Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission

TESTIMONY

Bill No 36-0045

November 4, 2025

Greetings, Honorable Senator Novelle E. Francis, Chairman of the Committee on Finance, Senator Angel Bolques, sponsor of Bill No 36-0045, all Senators, legislative staff, as well as the present, viewing and listening audience. I am Ms. Melissa I. Smith, Acting Executive Director of the Taxicab Commission (TCCB).

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak on this matter of vital importance to the Virgin Islands, the modernization of our Taxicab Commission through automation, by sharing testimony on Bill No. 36-0045, an Act appropriating the sum of \$400,000.00 from the Tourism Advertising Revolving Fund to the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission for the implementation of technological upgrades.

The Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission was established under Title 20, Chapter 37 of the Virgin Islands Code with a clear mandate to regulate and oversee the taxi industry, ensuring safety, fairness, and accountability. Yet, despite its critical role, the Commission continues to operate under a largely manual, paper-based system that limits its effectiveness and efficiency.

Title 3 of the V.I.C. governs the Commission's administrative processes, and I am confident that this bill would bring our existing system much-needed upgrades, improving our service response, turnaround time, and file management capabilities. From internal workflows to public reporting, a centralized digital platform would enhance our response to real time demands and quality control.

In an evolving industry such as taxi operating, it is imperative to not only keep up with the current standards, but maintain our ability to be competitive in the space. I am urging consideration of support of transformative potential in automated systems to support the Commission's core responsibilities of

- Licensing and regulating taxi drivers and vehicles
- Setting and enforcing fare schedules
- Conducting hearings and investigations and
- Enforcing compliance with taxi laws and regulations

We envision a system where taxi drivers can apply for licenses digitally, upload required documents, and receive automated reminders for renewals. Compliance documentation and reviews would be scheduled and tracked digitally, reducing delays and improving compliance.

It would include a case management module where complaints could be filed online, evidence to be submitted securely, and hearings to be conducted virtually. This would not only expedite investigations but also ensure procedural fairness and public trust.

It would also include a module that would interface with governmental partners such as Internal Revenue Bureau (IRB) Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV), Department of Property and Procurement (DPP) , Virgin Islands Police Department (VIPD) ,Department of Finance (DOF) and Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

Automation would streamline these processes, allowing staff to focus more on oversight and compliance rather than paperwork.

The Taxicab Commission's goal is to improve the taxi industry throughout the Territory by focusing on key areas of enhancement, areas that will improve operations, service efficiency and enforcement. One critical link to these improvements is the implementation of technological upgrades to the Taxicab Commissions computer systems.

Computer system upgrades that are linked to modernization and digital transformation are critical to VITCCs ability to provide improved approval and processing services for the Territory . The offices are in need of more than computer upgrades .

In order to grow with the on-set of new operators and to meet the service demands of the growing Virgin Islands Tourism Industry the VITCC must transitioning from paper-based records to a fully digital database.

This includes digitizing taxi medallion records, licensing, documents and enforcement data to improve operational efficiency. This improvement will streamline the documentation flow by providing the capability of communicating real-time with agency partners - (VIPD) for Police and Traffic Records , (IRB) for tax clearance verification and our key partner agency , (BMV) for the provision of Class C Driver's Licenses.

This system would also provide real-time statistical data that may be shared with the Bureau of Economic Recovery (BER) and a key stakeholder and agency partner , the Department of Tourism (DOT). This will also support the provision of other data requests for executive reporting as required.

VITCC is currently in discussions with the Bureau of information Technology (BIT) and the allotment of \$400,000.00 will be a significant support.

Justification for Funding Allocation to the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission

The appropriation of \$400,000 from the Tourism Advertising Revolving Fund to the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission is a strategic investment in modernizing the territory's transportation infrastructure and enhancing the overall customer experience. of Taxi Operators This funding is essential for the following reasons:

Operational Efficiency and Transparency

Digitization of Records:

Transitioning from a paper-based system to a digital platform will streamline internal operations, reduce administrative errors, and improve record-keeping accuracy.

Real-Time Data Access:

Staff will be able to access, update and process records instantly, improving responsiveness to customer inquiries and regulatory needs.

Collaboration with B.I.T. for Smart Solutions

Expert Guidance:

Partnering with the Bureau of Information Technology will ensure that the Commission selects the most effective and secure equipment and software tailored to its operational needs.

Cybersecurity and Compliance:

B.I.T.'s involvement helps safeguard sensitive data and ensures compliance with government IT standards.

Enhanced Customer Experience for Taxi Operators

Improved Customer Service:

Taxi Operators will benefit from a faster licensing processes with no lines and waiting service.

Streamlined Licensing and Renewals:

Taxi Operators will experience reduced wait times and simplified procedures, allowing them to focus on service delivery.

Data-Driven Planning:

Digital systems will allow the Commission to analyze taxi operator trends in leasing , operating vehicles and maintenance, maintaining current business licenses medallion sales and inventory tracking It will also track the current status of certain concessions.

This investment is not only a technological upgrade but also a commitment to elevating the Virgin Islands' transportation standards, supporting local drivers, and delivering a seamless experience to every operator who steps into a Virgin Islands Taxi Commission.

Fiscal Budget Planning and Allocation

The Commission will develop a detailed **expenditure plan** outlining specific technological needs, such as hardware, software, digitization services, and training, as applicable.

The budget will be justified to ensure alignment with the goals of the appropriation and in keeping with BIT's recommendations .

Oversight and Accountability

The TCC will implement a financial management standard that will follow the protocols already outlined by DOF, the Department of Property and Procurement (DPP) and OMB to ensure that all funds are used efficiently, transparently, and in accordance with Virgin Islands procurement laws and regulations. To add TCC has passed the newly introduced Delegated Authority testing issued by DPP.

Procurement and Solicitation Process

Consultation with B.I.T.

- The Bureau of Information Technology (B.I.T.) will be consulted throughout the process to ensure that all technology solutions are secure, scalable, and compatible with Government of the Virgin Islands Systems systems.
- B.I.T. will assist in drafting technical specifications and evaluating vendor proposals.
- All purchases and contracts will follow the Virgin Islands Procurement Code and Department of Property and Procurement (DPP) guidelines.

TCC will issue formal Requests for Proposals (RFPs) or Invitationns for Bids (IFBs) for major purchases and services.

- Solicitations will be publicly posted to ensure competitive bidding, fairness, and value for public funds.

Vendor Selection and Contracting

- Proposals will be evaluated based on technical merit, cost-effectiveness, and vendor qualifications.

- Contracts will be awarded to vendors that meet the criteria and demonstrate the ability to deliver quality solutions on time and within budget.
- All contracts will include **performance benchmarks** and **deliverable schedules**.

Monitoring and Reporting

- TCC will maintain detailed financial records and provide expenditure reports to the Legislature and relevant oversight bodies.
- An internal audit trail will be established to track every dollar spent, from appropriation to implementation.
- Any unspent funds will be reported and, if necessary, reprogrammed in accordance with legislative guidance.

Transparency

- TCC will provide periodic updates on project milestones, vendor selections, and spending summaries to the Taxi Cab Commission Board and other partners as requested to ensure public trust and transparency.
- Stakeholders, including taxi operators and the general public, will be informed of progress and invited to provide feedback.

By adhering to these procedures, the Taxicab Commission intends to not only ensure proper stewardship of public funds but also build a modern, efficient, and customer-friendly taxi operator oversight system that benefits not only our customers but employees as well.

This investment is not merely a technological upgrade; it is a commitment to elevating the Virgin Islands' transportation standards, supporting local drivers, and delivering a seamless experience to every visitor who steps into a Virgin Islands taxi.

In closing, the Virgin Islands deserves a Taxicab Commission that reflects the best of modern governance that is efficient, transparent, and responsive. Automation is not a luxury; it is a necessity. Investing in an upgraded system, demonstrates support to the Commission's mission to deliver better service to our community.

Thank you for your time and consideration.