



GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS
OF THE
UNITED STATES

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VIRGIN ISLANDS TAXICAB COMMISSION

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**TESTIMONY OF
VERNICE M. GUMBS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
VIRGIN ISLANDS TAXICAB COMMISSION**

**COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS
December 18, 2023**

Honorable Carla Joseph, Chairperson of the Committee on Government Operations & Consumer Protection, members, and non-members of the Committee on Government Operations & Consumer Protection, thank you for inviting me to speak before your committee today.

My name is Vernice M. Gumbs, Executive Director of the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission. Appearing remotely with me today are members of the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission's Board. Collectively, we will provide a status update on the Commission's operations and initiatives.

OPERATIONS

The Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission has struggled and continues to struggle financially to recover since the COVID-19 restrictions were implemented. First and foremost, VITCC does not have and never had a website to process online applications,

and payments, or anything for that matter and as such employees are not equipped and have never been equipped with the resources to work remotely.

During COVID, our workforce consisted of seven (7) employees territorially, of which our three (3) Officers were assigned to the COVID-19 Task Force, under the Department of Public Safety, at the expense of the Commission, which included vehicles, gas, repairs, and maintenance with no financial reimbursement from the COVID Task Force. One (1) employee was on military duty, for approximately 2 years with the Virgin Islands National Guard, before returning to work, and one (1) employee was on sick leave for approximately 18 months and subsequently retired. As such the agency was handicapped in so far as providing the necessary services to generate revenues resulting in expenses surpassing its cash-flow. Since then, two (2) employees have retired, and one (1) employee transferred to the Virgin Islands Army National Guard.

PERSONNEL SERVICES & FRINGE BENEFITS:

In the VITCC's FY 2024 budget, the Taxicab Commission requested funding for ten (10) positions which included five existing positions and five (5) vacant positions. Instead, the Legislature appropriated the sum of six hundred and fifty thousand, three hundred and eighty-three dollars, (\$650,383.00) specifically to fund only the filled positions. To avoid any disruptions in business by our prestigious taxi operators to provide for their families due to the inability of the regulatory agency to keep its doors open a supplemental appropriation of approximately five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000.00) will be required so that the agency may proceed with filling vacancies which are desperately needed for its the effectiveness, and payment of outstanding obligations, which includes but not limited to rent, office supplies, and fuel for Enforcement vehicles.

TCC's Digital Transformation

The most urgent and immediate goal of the Commission is to launch a digital transformation of its paper legacy records into an electronic management system that allows digital storage, collection, verification of records, and to fully automate its internal processes with the implementation of a web-based solution that will provide our employees and stakeholders the ability to conduct business efficiently by remotely renewing business licenses, making payments, and interfacing with a website that would provide up-to-date information regarding the automobile-for-hire industry.

To make this goal a reality, the Commission obtained bids from 2 different vendors. On September 29, 2023, the Board voted and selected OMNI Systems as the preferred vendor to implement TCC's digitization project, which requires the sum of approximately five hundred thousand dollars. Unfortunately, due to lack of funding the agency is not in a position to move forward.

Taxi Training and Licensing Certification Program

- Resuming the Taxi Training and Certification Program in conjunction with UVI-CELL and the Department of Tourism.
- Classes will be held on a quarterly basis.
- Upon completion, of the program, participants will obtain a basic understanding of the hospitality industry and the taxi operator's role in the industry.

CHALLENGES:

- 1) Due to lack of funding, the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission is unable to implement the technological infrastructure that would allow us to provide effective and efficient services to our constituents in real time.

- 2) TCC's in-house counsel was in the process of revising the policies and procedures of the agency; however, due to delays in the processing of vendor payments by the Department of Finance, our in-house attorney has not been paid and has placed all assignments from the Board on hold until payment is received.
- 3) The lack of rules and regulations by the Department of Licensing & Consumer Affairs as it pertains to the business licenses being issued for limousines services, their failure to provide enforcement from encroachment of the taxi operators has created undue hardship and the devaluation of taxi medallions territory wide. There is a loud cry from our prestigious operators to return the licensing of limousines to the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission which regulates the automobile for hire industry.
- 4) The lack of budgetary support from the Legislature for the desperately needed digital transformation and hiring of additional staff, to include Enforcement Officers.

PLAN OF ACTION:

- To implement card and contactless payment options in automobiles for hire, giving drivers the time, they need to negotiate with card payment providers to get the best deal for themselves and their passengers, the ability to have payment position available to their passengers, and in the end making sure that their passengers enjoy a pleasant experience.
- To continue lobbying for the funding needed to hire the necessary staff, pay its vendors, and avoid any disruption in business by our industry operators who are the last local business standing in the territory especially now that we are in the tourist season.

CLOSING:

Taxis have a long and proud history in the Territory. They provide reliable and trusted services to tourists, businessmen and women locally and abroad, and to our local community. They provide customer safety, convenience, and second-to-none knowledge of our beautiful islands. Smart phones have transformed how many of us organize the way we travel as travel-apps are at the forefront of the app revolution. Today, VITCC is preparing to play a vital role in the future of the automobile-for-hire industry by implementing the desperately needed digital transformation. Thank you for providing me the opportunity to present my testimony on the overview of the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission.

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