



TROPICAL ADVENTURE GROUP

Good morning, Chairperson Carla Joseph, members of the Committee on Government Operations, Veteran Affairs, and Consumer Protection, esteemed Senators, legislative staff, and those watching and listening.

My name is Chris Watson, the Chief Executive Officer of The Tropical Adventure Group based in St. Thomas. Our company specializes in watersports and transportation, operating from two locations with a strong focus on providing limousine services to visitors.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak today regarding the proposed amendments to Title 3 of the Virgin Islands Code.

I am here not only on behalf of The Tropical Adventure Group but also to represent other limousine operators who share our concerns about the potential impact of Bill 35-0251. These operators have asked me to convey their apprehensions, which align closely with our own.

The necessity of this bill is unclear to us, as current regulations seem to be functioning sufficiently. Although there is a major overabundance of operators in St Thomas, many of whom do not actually operate as a limousine service, along with some individuals who misuse limousine business licenses to bypass certain regulations, such as those governing tinted windows, we believe that further government oversight is unnecessary.

While we support some aspects of the bill, such as the proposed dress code for drivers, we strongly oppose subsection (j), which suggests amending the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission to include limousine operators. From my own research, I believe this proposal is largely opposed by the overwhelming majority of limousine operators.

Regarding the proposed adoption of a dress code; while we understand its intent, we anticipate challenges in enforcement. Many operators, including ourselves, find that guests and hotels prefer a more relaxed, yet professional, attire rather than a full suit and bow tie. This preference aligns with comfort in our tropical climate and the nature of the driver's job, which often involves extended periods of sitting and handling luggage. Additionally, it aligns with the 'theme' that many resorts wish to project as in some cases we work exclusively for major properties who offer a 'barefoot luxury' experience.



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On the topic of vehicle specifications, we urge careful consideration of technological advancements. Current guidelines, based on verbal information rather than the lack of official documentation that I have repeatedly asked for, require limousines to have amenities like televisions or refrigerators. With modern vehicles often now equipped with mobile devices instead of fixed screens, and with the growing popularity of larger SUV models, it seems unreasonable to exclude certain luxury vehicles that aren't SUV's.

Countless operators use Chevrolet Suburbans, or Cadillac Escalades. It is imperative that a business has a unique selling point beyond the price difference of its competitors. With such restrictions on vehicle choices, especially when considering our island terrain, vehicle types must be considered very carefully, and not solely based on their interior amenities. Current pricing to purchase a new compliant vehicle ranges from \$80,000 to well over \$100,000.

We are fully supportive of routine drug testing and already conduct random tests to ensure compliance with company policy.

However, we must express our significant reservations about entrusting the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission with oversight of limousine operations, given its long-standing issues and current workload. We are extremely concerned that this move could disrupt our business operations and we do not support a bill that places our industry under an agency struggling with its existing responsibilities.

A direct quote from a senator stated: "The Taxicab Commission needs an Inspector General audit. This is a complete mess. It's a mess. And it's not good business."

As a business owner I cannot have my business moved under a commission that is spoken about in that manner from a Senator in this body.



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To be blunt, this is a terrible idea.

Operating costs within the territory are already extremely high and moving us under the taxi commission under the threat of having to potentially purchase expensive medallions or have rates set by the government will greatly impact our ability to do business in the territory, and provide good paying jobs to the community.

Instead, I encourage you to limit the amount of business licenses, and conduct enforcement activities on unrecognized vehicles pretending to be limousines.

In conclusion, limousines are fundamentally different from taxi cabs, and regulating them under the Taxicab Commission seems gravely misplaced. I can see absolutely no justification in spending money from the public purse to implement a bill which has **absolutely no benefit to the taxpayers of this territory**. The department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs has handled the limousine industry well for many years. It should be left alone.

If limousine operators are to be regulated in this manner, I look forward to attending hearings about regulating boat charters through a "*ferry boat commission*" or short term rentals through the "*VI Department of AirBnBs*."

To add, it is my understanding it is proposed that the VI Taxi Commission is intending to implement a change that operators must have a class 'C' drivers license.

While we don't necessarily oppose this requirement, in order to obtain this license, an operator must first attend the Taxi and Tour Certification Class. This class has not been offered in approximately five years, and the wait list is around 3,000 people long. This was confirmed by the Taxi Commission just last week.

This bill will create immense harm, and loss of business for limousine operators, and their staff.

I am happy to address any questions you may have.