

East Taxi Association
6117 Red Hook Quarters
St. Thomas, VI 00802

September 20, 2024

Senator Carla Joseph
Legislature of the Virgin Islands
St. Thomas, VI 00802

Good day,

Greetings to all Senators, Committee Senators, testifiers and the people of the United States Virgin Islands. My name is Mervin Smith, President of the East End Taxi Association.

I am in support of bill #35-0251 and the reason of me doing this is because it is not only the right thing to do, but it is a start to correct the wrong that was done to the taxi industry. In 2012, when the legislature of the Virgin Islands was giving the taxi organizations their franchise agreement, an amendment was inserted to remove the limousines from under the Taxi Cab Commission, and have them be placed under the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs and also have the limousines be labeled as not being vehicles for hire (ACT NO. 7451 Section 2). This was an utter disrespect for all taxi operators and medallion owners of the Virgin Islands.

As of recent, no rules or regulations have been brought by this body or the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs to regulate the limousine services. In amending this bill, it will begin the process and correct the wrong that was done to the taxi industry. Currently, limousines are allowed to do whatever they are pleased to do with no oversight or rules to govern them. Although, we do support this bill, we would like to see additional amendments coming from this body that will not only strengthen this bill in regards to other entities, but would also stop the infringement on the taxi industry. (Ex. Gypsy taxi, illegal business operating jeep tours, black car services, digital app VI Hail, and shuttle bus services)

I am requesting for you, the Senators who is also the law makers of the United States Virgin Islands, to provide me and the rest of the Taxi industry, the provisions in the law that speaks to these entities for them to operate. The Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs are providing limousine license to individuals, and they are not following the laws in accordance to the Virgin Islands Code book under title 20 VIC section 101, the definition for automobile for hire/passenger for hire 20 VIC section 401. These laws definitely have been violated and ignored for too long.

Limousines are conducting shuttle services for hotels which is clearly a violation and these operators do not possess a chauffeur license. There is nothing in the law that talk about the shuttle bus services but it do speak about courtesy rides for rental car services of which, once a

fee is charged, those passengers are for hire and must be transported by a vehicle for hire with a medallion. The laws of the Virgin Islands were created for order, so please follow!

The renaming of the commission is welcomed, however, in my opinion, the name should be that of the Virgin Islands Vehicle for Hire Commission and place all vehicles for hire under that commission. Once this bill is passed and become law, a supplemental budget can be implemented and assist with the additional duties added to the commission and a commission board will need to be aligned.

Why is the taxi industry not given notice of the board meetings? If we were given notice, members from various taxi cab associations can attend and isn't there a sunshine law in effect? The monies collected from taxi operators do pay their salaries!! In closing, I would like for all the Senators of this 35th legislature to stand with the people of these Virgin Islands to keep the one and only business in the hands of the people. Our ancestors have already set a blueprint for this industry for entrepreneurship, and to not allow cooperation's to take it away from us and make us employees for them. I look forward for any questions you may have, and I thank you for allowing me to state my case.

Sincerely,

Mervin Smith
President/East End Taxi