

**Testimony on Bill No. 35-0251 Elizabeth Hansen Watley Assistant Commissioner,  
Department of Tourism, Acting Chair of the Taxicab Commission Board**

September 18, 2024

Greetings Honorable Senator Carla Joseph, Chairwoman of the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection, all Senators, and legislative staff, as well as the present, viewing and listening audience. I am Elizabeth Hansen Watley, Assistant Commissioner of the Department of Tourism (DOT) and Acting Chair of the Taxicab Commission Board.

Thank you for extending an invitation to me as Vice Chair of the Taxicab Commission Board to contribute to the dialogue surrounding Bill No. 35-0251. A Bill amending title 3 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 16, section 274 relating to the changing of the name of the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission to the Virgin Islands Taxicab and Limousine Commission and giving oversight authority to the Virgin Islands Taxicab and Limousine Commission over limousine services operators, and for other related purposes. As proposed by Senator Marvin A. Blyden.

It is my pleasure to lend some insight based on ongoing research into the stipulations within Bill No. 35-2051 on behalf of the Taxicab Commission Board.

As it pertains to the changing of the Taxicab Commission's name to Virgin Islands Taxicab and Limousine Commission, it is the board's collective opinion that this name is very specific, while we are moving into an age where we are now seeing other types of transit that may fall under the umbrella of Taxicab Commission, we suggest that the name be more inclusive. Our suggestion falls along the lines of "The Virgin Islands Vehicle for Hire Commission".

I think it is first important to properly clarify the designation of Limousines for all parties concerned to be clear that a Limousine is designated as a "**Passenger for hire**" vehicle, and not a "**Automobile for hire**" vehicle.

**A "Passenger for hire"** vehicle is contractually arranged and settled in advance. See below. (Reference: VIC Title 20, Ch.31, subsection 101)

"automobile for hire" means a motor vehicle operated for the purpose of transporting passengers for hire in the Virgin Islands and shall include motor vehicles operated for the purpose of conducting tours whether or not on fixed routes or on established schedules, but shall not include motor vehicles operated as motor busses or passenger-carrying trucks subject to regulation under the provisions of chapter 1, Title 30 of this code nor motor vehicles owned by the Government of the Virgin Islands or by the Government of the United States nor drive-yourself motor vehicles for lease or courtesy rides from drive yourself motor vehicle operators with current lease agreements with the Port Authority to their customers to or from their rental

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facility; “Bureau” means the Bureau of Motor Vehicles; “dealer” means any person engaged in the business of buying, selling, or exchanging motor vehicles; “Director” means the Director of the Bureau of Motor Vehicles; “motor vehicle” includes all vehicles propelled by power other than muscular, except those running upon rails or tracks, road rollers, tractors, and self-propelled plows and golf carts used solely for recreational purposes on golf courses and not on public roads or highways; “operator” includes a chauffeur, driver, or any person operating a motor vehicle; “owner” includes any person owning a motor vehicle, or renting a motor vehicle or having the exclusive use thereof under a contract or lease, or otherwise; **“Passengers for hire” means occupants of a motor vehicle (1) who pay a fixed rate or fee for transportation in a motor vehicle operated on the highways of the Virgin Islands; or (2) whose transportation in a motor vehicle operated on the highways of the Virgin Islands is furnished as incidental to the use, or as part of the cost for the use of any hotel, motel, guest house or other tourist-oriented facility, nor limousines, which for purposes of this title, are defined as any large, luxurious sedan, driven by a chauffeur and for which the principal terms of service are contractually arranged and settled in advance.** “public road or highway” includes all roads, highway and parking areas open for use by the public; and “town limits” means the territorial limits of the towns of Charlotte Amalie, Christiansted, and Frederiksted, fixed in sections 81, 82 and 83 of Title 1. “trailer” includes every vehicle having an overall length of more than 8 feet without motive power designed for carrying persons or property and for being drawn by a motor vehicle. “Veteran” means a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released therefrom under conditions other than dishonorable.

With that said. The consensus of the TaxiCab Commission Board (TCCB) is that there is definitely a need for uniformity and cohesiveness in the way we conduct business within the transportation industry within our territory, and with some collaboration with all the key players, we see great improvement in closing the gaps that stand to hamper progress and growth in the industry.

Applauding Senator Marvin Byden’s attempt at addressing concerns pertaining to Limousine services in the territory in Bill No. 35-0251. The discussion needs to be had about the lack of funding that TaxiCab Commission has been experiencing in addition to the cost of operations that this legislation will require moving forward. In addition to this, TCCB has some concerns with this legislation that we believe could be rectified with the implementations of suggested amendments as follows.

- Set a clear funding source and budget that will allow for the stability of the Taxicab Commission operations, as well as additional funding for recruitment and hiring of additional officers, inspectors, and support staff.
- Power of oversight and regulations should fall under the jurisdiction of the Taxicab Commission Board if transfer occurs, giving the same authority over limousines as is given over taxis and other vehicles for hire. As the bill is written, limousines will function

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as it does under the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs (DLCA) until such time as legislation is implemented to change it. The Board believes that this does not allow for proper regulation or oversight by the commission board, and has no clear date of any changes as there is no guarantee that legislation will be passed to allow for regulation or management concerns, though the bill stipulates that upon effective date of this bill, the Taxicab commission has 180 days to come up with recommendations to be submitted to this committee's Chair and the Office of the President.

- Create a category of operations under the newly named commission that is curtailed to deal with the rules and regulations specific to "Passenger for hire" vehicles that would include limousines and rideshare services.
- Mandate the collaboration of DLCA, Taxicab Commission and the Bureau of Motor Vehicles to come up with the best possible method of operations in preparation for a transfer of operations from DLCA to TCC within a year of passing the amended bill.

Once again, I would like to thank you all for my inclusion on behalf of the Taxicab Commission Board, and stand ready to assist in the improvement of our transportation industry.

Elizabeth Hansen Watley

Assistant Commissioner, USVI Department of Tourism

Acting Chair, Taxicab Commission