

THE HONORABLE SENATOR AVERY L. LEWIS

Legislative Secretary

36TH LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS



Chair: Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, Consumer Protection

Vice Chair: Committee on Education and Workforce Development

Member: Committee on Rules and Judiciary

Committee on Culture, Youth, Aging, and Parks

Committee on Homeland Security, Justice and Public Safety

Committee of the Whole

TO: Ms. Kurrell Sheridan, Executive Director

FROM: Honorable Avery L. Lewis 116 Senator, 36th Legislature

DATE: February 24, 2025

RE: Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, Consumer Protection

The Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection met in the Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall on Monday, February 24, 2025, at 9:00 AM. In Block I, committee members received an update from the Department of Property and Procurement (DPP) about contractual agreements, vendor payments, and the GVI Buy Software. Additionally, the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs (DLCA) updated the Committee on programs that prevent fraudulent, deceptive, and unfair business practices and information to help consumers spot, stop, and avoid scams and fraud. Key points included a fuel price survey, frequency of grocery price analyses, and the status of capital projects. The invited testifier was the Honorable Lisa Alejandro, Commissioner, joined by her leadership.

Additional testimony included the DPP's Business and Commercial Unit that manages all properties leased to the government, currently totaling 190 tenants, with an annual rent of \$3,995,817; information about repairs to the St. Croix Office, and lease ratifications. The unit oversees submerged, filled, and agricultural land leases managed by DPNR and the Department of Agriculture. The Space Management Unit is responsible for 160 commercial leases on behalf of executive branch agencies, GVI-owned, storage, parking, and telecommunication spaces.

DPP reported there are currently four disaster recovery projects in which damage costs are being updated. These include the main building, transportation building, Warehouse on St. Thomas, and the former HOVENSA Vocational Building on St. Croix. During the Fiscal Year 2024, the Department executed a total of 407 contracts, which totaled \$1,013,082,079.87. Of these contracts, 30 were disaster recovery projects totaling \$482,915,034.73. In the Fiscal Year 2025, 40 solicitations have been processed. Of these solicitations, 4 are disaster recovery projects. The Department also executed 96 contracts totaling \$38,714,919 worth of goods and services. Four of these projects are disaster recovery projects, totaling \$2,097,960. GVIBUY, an eProcurement system, is in live production. Errors must be rectified before payment.

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In Block II, Myrna George, Deputy Commissioner of the Virgin Islands Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs, delivered testimony on behalf of the Honorable H. Nathalie Hodge, Commissioner. George stated that approximately 320 citizen complaints had been resolved or forwarded to the appropriate agency in the territory. When questioned about a more transparent reporting and investigative process, like a Better Business Bureau system.

DLCA ensures that all businesses adhere to all licensing and regulatory requirements, such as adequately calibrating weights and measures. George reiterated in testimony that while the DLCA enforces consumer protection laws, it is limited to regulatory enforcement related to business compliance and fair-trade practices. DLCA's authority includes addressing consumer complaints related to the mispricing of items, business malpractice, and regulatory violations; however, it does not extend to prosecuting criminal offenses such as fraud.

The Department provides a "Shopping Basket" that reflects the current prices of goods at any time. While it does not conduct a Market Basket Survey intended for long-term analysis, transparency in providing price information keeps the public informed about the cost of living in the territory. Items in the Shopping Basket are regularly rotated, and data collected does not allow for direct price comparison of different periods. The Bureau of Economic Research is compiling the Consumer Price Index or a formal Market Basket Survey. A Food, Fuel, and Housing Study began in the territory in April 2017, but the initial report lacked thoroughness due to data unavailability. Funding has been secured to resume the study. The performance period began on December 31, 2024 and ends December 31, 2026.

Through the Chair Requests

The Department of Property and Procurement (DPP)

- Provide a list of evidence of the last six (6) mos. of complaint logs. **Sen. Carla Joseph**
- Provide a list of businesses that failed weights and measures testing. **Sen. Fonseca**
- How many businesses were penalized for non-compliance last year? **Sen. Johnson**
- How much have you collected in fines/penalties to store owners? **Sen. Blyden**
- How much revenue has been collected by DLCA? **Sen. Francis, Jr.**
- With the rise of e-businesses, how is DLCA monitoring? **Sen. Bolques, Jr.**
- Provide a list of specific vacancies at DLCA. **Sen. Lewis**

The Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs (DLCA)

- Provide a list of all agriculture land leases. **Sen. Fonseca**
- How many ambulances are in the fleet for VIFS? **Sen. Fonseca**
- Did the company Pafford take back any ambulances? **Sen. Fonseca**
- What is the number of leases currently being worked on? **Sen. Carla Joseph**
- Submit a copy of DNS Trucking Contract for the storing of aged wood at Alexander Henderson School on St. Croix. – **Sen. Gittens**
- Provide a report on Hotel on the Cay for the last ninety (90) days, by the close of business on Wednesday, February 26, 2025. – **Sen. Francis, Jr.**

Senators present were Avery L. Lewis, Novelle E. Francis, Jr., Ray Fonseca, Alma Francis Heyliger, Kenneth L. Gittens, Franklin D. Johnson, and Carla J. Joseph. Non-committee members present were Angel L. Bolques, Jr., Clifford Joseph, Marvin Blyden, Kurt A. Vialet, and Hubert Frederick.