

# THE HONORABLE SENATOR AVERY L. LEWIS

Legislative Secretary

36<sup>TH</sup> 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

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**May 30, 2025**

## **COMMITTEE RECEIVES UPDATES FROM TAXICAB COMMISSION AND VI LOTTERY**

The Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection, chaired by Senator Avery L. Lewis, met in the Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall. Lawmakers received updates from the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission and the Virgin Islands Lottery regarding their current operations and plans to advance our systems forward.

Melissa Smith, Acting Executive Director of the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission, stated that the issue of illegal taxi operators in the territory had become increasingly urgent and reminded the operators that each client must meet strict requirements to operate as a "Class C" operator in the Virgin Islands or become a medallion owner. Smith stated that these unregulated operators potentially lack the proper insurance, vehicle inspections, and background checks, and increase the risk of accidents, assaults, and other incidents for residents and visitors.

Key highlights included the recommendation to improve taxi operator oversight, the local government should pool resources by creating memoranda of agreement and understanding to strengthen efficiency in regulating infractions, update current regulations, integrate existing surveillance to monitor illegal operations, and digitize and modernize operations.

Smith voiced the need to provide avenues for legal operations, such as taxicab operators classes at UVICELL, implementation of public awareness campaigns, and increasing its budgetary ceiling. Smith recommended that law enforcement leadership be brought into the agency to improve enforcement. She stated that there have been seven issued citations, but no hearings had been held for the citations. According to Smith, there are 1,923 medallions territory-wide, with 1,280 in St. Thomas, 565 in St. Croix, and 178 in St. John. Of these, approximately 650 have renewed their business licenses. Additionally, Smith voiced the need for better real-time accounting of collections in the agency.

Raymond Williams, Executive Director of the Virgin Islands Lottery, also delivered testimony to update the public on the Lottery's operations after the recent cyberattack. Williams stated that tickets for Drawing 1048 began sales on St. Croix for two days on March 13 and March 14, and a half day on St. Thomas on March 14<sup>th</sup>. On the morning of March 17, 2025, upon the arrival of staff in both districts, it was discovered that their systems were not operational, and attempts were made to reboot them. Lottery contacted its consultant, Smartpoint Inc., who also tried rebooting systems but was unsuccessful. Smartpoint then traveled to St. Croix, and after further evaluation, it was discovered that there was a ransomware attack territory-wide, and a ransom note, saying that if the agency wanted

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their information back, it would be returned for a fee of \$1 million. The entire system had been encrypted, which rendered it non-operational. A similar attack in 2024 affected the St. Thomas Office, but there was backup information in St. Croix. Servers, computers, and other systems affected by the attack were taken offline, sanitized, and rebuilt. Information from previous drawings, receipts, prize payments, and other information had to be manually reentered into the system for information from Drawing 1027 in February 2024 to Drawing 1046 in February 2025. Drawing 1047 was hosted on April 28, 2025. Tickets for this drawing were meant to be drawn on March 13<sup>th</sup>.

Senators present at today's Committee hearing were Avery L. Lewis, Novelle E. Francis, Jr., Ray Fonseca, Alma Francis Heyliger, Kenneth L. Gittens, Franklin D. Johnson, Carla J. Joseph, and non-committee member Kurt Vialet.

**Through the Chair Requests for the Taxicab Commission:**

1. Was the issue resolved legally regarding the quorum of the board that selected Ms. Melissa Smith, Acting Executive Director? – Sen. Alma Francis Heyliger
2. Forward the last four (4) months of collections. – Sen. Carla J. Joseph
3. Provide the minutes from the Taxicab Commission Board from December 1, 2024 to March 30, 2025. – Sen. Carla J. Joseph
4. Provide the full curriculum provided by UVI Cell. – Sen. Avery L. Lewis
5. Provide the names of the current board members. – Sen. Avery L. Lewis
6. Provide the number of taxi operators currently. – Sen. Ray Fonseca

**Through the Chair Request for the Virgin Islands Lottery:**

Provide committee with detail listing of all financial savings investments, CDs, money markets, stocks, mutual funds, bonds, held by the lottery. – Sen. Ray Fonseca

Senators in attendance included Avery L. Lewis, Ray Fonseca, Jr., Carla J. Joseph, Novelle E. Francis, Jr., Franklin D. Johnson, Kenneth L. Gittens, and Alma Francis Heyliger. Non-committee member Angel L. Bolques, Jr. was also present.

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