



| Government Operations, Veteran Affairs and Consumer Protection

Legislature USVI

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0:00:00 This video is a production of WGBH. Thank you. [2 such phrases repeated 10 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

0:05:00 Thank you. Thank you.

0:06:00 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

0:07:30 Thank you. so Thank you. [2 such phrases repeated 12 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

0:14:00 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

0:17:00 Thank you. We'll be right back. [2 such phrases repeated 10 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

0:22:00 Thank you. Thank you.

0:23:00 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

0:26:00 Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

0:28:30 Thank you. We'll be right back. [2 such phrases repeated 16 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

0:36:30 Good evening. The Committee on Government Operations, Veteran Affairs, and Consumer Protection Taxicab Operators Town Hall Meeting for this evening from 6 to 8 p.m. Friday, March 8, 2024 is hereby call to order. We are going to be a little bit more relaxed than if we were in a committee meeting, and We have three gentlemen here, seated before us, who are representing various aspects of the taxicab industry in the St. Croix District.

- 0:37:11 This town hall meeting is the third and the last, but definitely not the least, in a series of town hall meetings, the Committee on Government Operations, Veteran Affairs and Consumer Protection started way back in June of 2023 in the St. John. We then went to the other sister island in St. Thomas on September 29th and we had a town hall meeting with the taxi drivers on that island. So we're coming full circle and closing out the last in a series of meetings to hear from our taxicab operators in the territory about their needs and services provided by the taxicab Commission. Following this meeting and I'm going to be taking some copious notes and this town hall meeting I plan to report the committee's finding to the Brian Roach administration and the next step will be a meeting with the administration to discuss a way forward to address the concerns and recommendations provided by our taxi cab operators throughout our territory. So I have joining me the Committee on Rules and Judiciary Chair Person the Honorable Diane T. Capehart. Welcome Senator Capehart. And we also have three gentlemen here from the taxicab commission taxi cab operators and I note that we have joining us virtually the executive director for the taxicab Commission miss Vernice Gumbs so gentlemen I want to just first ask you to make sure and those of you who are joining us in the gallery to make sure your phones just a housekeeping matter make sure your phones are on vibrate this is going to be a conversation it is being recorded and carried live so we want to really have an opportunity to hear directly from you regarding what are some of your challenges and your issues and see if you could also bring some solutions to us and let us know how we can improve the taxi industry on this island and even throughout the Virgin Islands. So we want to be able to have that conversation with you and I want to thank you for being here with us this evening and taking time out of your busy schedule to attend this town
- 0:39:54 hall meeting, the last in a series of town hall meeting we held. Senator Kepa, would you like to make any comments? I just wanna say good evening to the chairperson of this committee. Thank you for holding this town hall meeting and to the taxi men that are here before us so we can hear the challenges that you face in on the island of St. Croix. Senator, I know you held a meeting on St. Thomas. and with parity, I see that you're having one on St. Croix, thank you.
- 0:40:39 Definitely St. Croix is very important to us all as legislators, so I don't want to shortchange. The announcement for the meeting was on the media sources, various media sources, and also My staff and I personally handed out flyers to individuals in Christianstead. We placed the posters at the seaplane, and we also handed out flyers at the taxicab stand at the Henry R. Wilson Airport.
- 0:41:15 So we have done all that we could to inform the public about this meeting. In fact, I got calls in St. Thomas about the meeting. So with all of that said, I will ask that from my right, it will be your left. Starting from my right. Good evening. Good evening. Hello. I'm not sure if you're hearing me, but I can't hear anyone on the other end. Ms. Gumbs, is that you?
- 0:41:46 Yeah. Would you be so kind to put on your, maybe you may need to log off and log back on. okay i can i can try logging out and logging back on okay so that's that's what i what i stated and hello yes hello yes log back on try to log out and see yeah what you are hearing me are you hearing me miss gums Ms. Gumbs?
- 0:42:19 Ms. Gumbs? Okay, so we will wait for her to log back on. Nonetheless, let's proceed after we've made the introductions. We'll start on my right, your left. The gentleman in the yellow kindly indicates your name for the record. My name is Samuel Ferdinand. Samuel Ferdinand? Samuel Ferdinand. Okay, I'm not sure if the mics are picking it up. Repeat it once more.
- 0:42:55 My name is Samuel Ferdinand, better known as Mighty Pat. Thank you, and welcome. Next. My name is Edward Stephen. Thank you, Mr. Stephen, and welcome. My name is Paul Roberts, better known as RISPEC. Roberts, thank you and welcome Mr. Roberts. And I know we have other individuals in the gallery and they are also observing. So I wanted to just start off the meeting with you first.
- 0:43:36 Mr. Ferdinand, if you could just tell us some of the challenges that you've been encountering uh with the taxicab commission and how long you have been a taxicab operator yeah um i've been a taxicab commission operator for over three 30 years 33 years off and on because sometimes i you know will go different places spend years in singing and come back this is always my job any i could go away for four or five years come back i'm a taxi driver well for the past couple of years i'm here and there's a lot of um disturbances in the taxi industry especially with these kind of with these guys were calling themselves uber you know we're having a big problem we shot with these guys driving taxi up and down the road calling their self uber it gets so bad that the hotels are now getting um the the people um at the desk to call their friends to pick up people as taxis and they are they're bold enough now to be coming in front of us and picking up people and then cuss us when we talk to them about um illegal taxi driving and like they said they have no police officers now belong to us so they could do as the like dlca uh which is graham and all those guys they're part of this um this thing that is going on because graham will like to see the taxi industry turn into into um uber you know he's one of those guys who encourage these things you know i heard the governor and i'll talk about it you know they like to get uber to come here but all i'm saying if you want to do something it must be

- 0:45:23 legal you know you mustn't got people just um you got continentals now who calling their friends from united states of america bringing them to the virgin island to drive uber there's no uber in the virgin islands you know and um this thing is getting um is totally out of hand when you look at it it's totally out of hand the taxi drivers there are actually fed up we we call um to police nobody paying us no attention people are renting buses and coming down by the um by the ship picking up people in front of us and when we talk to them they say well we could do it because there's nobody there to stop us you know we're driving uber what you could do about it and so on and you're getting i mean it's disgusting for us we have nobody um in the past couple of years maybe five years they have not have a taxi test there's so many people out there who would like to drive taxi but don't have the opportunity to drive taxi there's a lot of guys who actually driving this so-called uber they will never get a taxi license because they have a felon and you cannot drive a taxi if you have a felon so the the opportunity is there for them enough to be up and down in the road are we gonna wait the question is are we gonna wait until something happen and then you got honest uh from the custodian who gonna say taxi when you know You know, he's not a taxi, that's how he make his money, by fraudulent news, you know? And this kind of thing, we're gonna wait until it happens.
- 0:46:48 So all these things that happen to taxi drivers now, we have nobody to help us. I mean, Ms. Gumbs is on her own. We love Ms. Gumbs, because she tried her best to help us, but she's on her own. There's nobody to help Ms. Gumbs. She told me she asked for this and asked for that, nobody there to help her because this and because that. You know it's a hard thing on our behalf that people could just get up and rent a car, rent a bus, and drive a taxi. And we don't pay all this money for a medallion, pay all this money for insurance, and all the different things with nobody to represent us. Sometimes the guy who run in the road, he stop in the road, a police give him a ticket because he stopped. How about these guys who are doing all this illegal driving? the other day went down to, not Cane Bay, but Williams in Frederickstead, 13 people come into my bus, so I said, well, I only carry six, so what the other, what's the you doing here, they say, well, they call a taxi, and they say there's a red taxi coming to pick them up, so I said, well, I'm not going to carry you guys, you guys come back out of the van and wait for the other bus, so while I'm there waiting, a caravan come up pick up the people and I said that's not a taxi the guy said I don't care whether taxi or not you understand I even take the taxi license and it to arm them either in them ways of time pick up there's other seven people and go with them well in front of me I mean this thing is hard and us where we got other people just doing as they like as taxi drivers shiny bay King Christian hotel a caravel all the different people are just calling the guys the people at the desk calling their friends to pick up people as taxi drivers you understand so the taxi i really are not getting a job i don't talk for holding some of them i ain't even get
- 0:48:42 one job but i see people passing i'm picking up people all the time passing picking up people they say oh that's a uber that's a uber there's no uber on the island and then you have graham them who are given limousine license you could have one limousine license on 20 limousine and i only could have two actually medallion and have two taxis these things are wrong totally wrong and actually we are wondering where is the help where we're gonna get the help from are we gonna wait till this thing get totally out of hand so you got people fighting taxis around taxis you're fighting people in front of these people when they come in here I mean something has to be done to this thing to stop all this thing from going on in the Virgin Islands right now is out of hand the question is how are you going to call it and that's the problem we are having out there every day God said down in the Christian stead down by the ship you all of these people come in and doing illegal taxi driving and there's nobody to stop them nobody whatsoever because they say oh you all don't have any taxi police now how about the ordinary police officer who will stop and give a taxi driver ticket isn't he part of the law you understand could um is it is it Ms. Gums can't call the police commission and ask for his help in curving these problems that are going on with us right now in the Virgin Islands. Sometimes I wonder why we have senators. You know, all these different things. I have to ask myself this question. Why do we have senators? There's nobody to help us.
- 0:50:12 I mean, you're laughing, but, you know. You should get out of the police. I want to know what's going on, you know, so, I mean, I look at my senators then first. And then I will call Kenny, and Kenny will try. I'll call Frankie. Frankie will try. They will try to help me as much as they can, but how far they can go. You all make laws. Now it's up to the people that have to carry laws. Oh, did you hear so? So how a man could have one limousine? That's the question I wanted to ask myself. So he pay \$500, and then with that one license, he got 20 limousines. And we all stand up and watch this.
- 0:50:48 Look what happened to us as taxi drivers. If I'm late in paying a fee, I got to pay \$350, I mean, come on, Senators. You already see this as wrong for the Senator, late charge for \$350? That's ridiculous. That's the worst thing I ever hear me holding the left hand. Why don't you stop this thing? And just to be clear, you're talking about a renewal of your taxi license. No, if you have a lease. The lease. I leased a taxi plate, right? Okay. From this guy. Just drop in reference. I leased a taxi plate from him. And if I'm late in paying the lease, the cost of being late is \$350, not even the bank that charges that kind of money. And there's nobody to say, oh, gosh, man.

- 0:51:31 Guys, these are human beings like us. We are taxi drivers, and then the Uber man could just do as he like, and nobody, then nobody doing him anything. The guy that driving a gypsy taxi could do as he like, nobody doing him anything. I mean, come on. You got people coming from the United States right now. they're calling their friend and telling them to come and get a job with us. Who is us? You understand? Illegal taxi. They're renting cars. They're renting vans. And every time the ship come here, come down here, see them. I mean, you can go online. As a matter of fact, there's a guy right now who buys a 24-seater bus and send \$250 for tours. Why he don't want to do tours? You understand? These are the things that we face as taxi drivers, and we are asking the help of the senators, the police officers, whoever, I mean, DLCA, we know that Graham ain't going to help us because he is part of this.
- 0:52:24 You understand? He is part of the problem as far as I'm concerned. You understand? That's all I have to say for now. Okay, thank you. I was very generous. I didn't put a time limit on it at all because it's only three of you here, and so far it's only, and I want to definitely welcome committee member and Senate Majority Leader, the Honorable Senator Kenneth Gittins, to the meeting, and I'm very happy that he came. So I was a bit lenient with the time because we're having a conversation.
- 0:53:00 So since it's only three of you, I would say we can go ahead because we have until 8 o'clock, okay? Mr. Stephens, Mr. Edwin Stephens, you are recognized. Kindly recognized Senator Kenneth Gittin's mic. Media. Thank you and good evening to all. I just want to note that while I understand your frustration and I hear it every day, and I see it, I too am frustrated because from where I sit I am no longer the enforcer. But everything that you have stated there, I want you to know that the problem is enforcement.
- 0:53:54 The laws are on the books that should be adhered to, and if they're violated, then some law enforcement entity or government entity should be addressing it so I just want to be clear on that because I know that the quickest way that we feel to get the attention almost immediate is to go to the Senate but then again sometimes I just feel like I'm outpiece because I am unable to enforce what you're talking about so the illegal use of uber and whatever else is transpiring that's why we have law enforcement officers and the Commission to advise what's illegal and they should be immediately addressed so hopefully through this town hall meeting we can get not only the taxicab commission who is going to tell you that they're strapped for manpower but all our law enforcement officers should be fully versed in what the law calls under title 20 for vehicles for hire thank you thank you so much senator Gittens before we proceed with mr.
- 0:55:27 Stevens missus what we're going to do is we're gonna have each of you present your testimony and you have a discussion with us and then colleagues we miss gums is online virtually miss gums can you hear us now yes i can uh is it possible for you to turn on your visual i certainly can kindly do so so i'm using my my phone because of course our machines in the office do not have the ability to participate in Teams reading as there's no video, no camera and or mic. Okay. Well, we could hear you loud and clear. Your phone is operating very good and we can see you as well. And I'm sure all of your clients here, the taxicab operators can see you also. So we're very appreciative that you have the ingenuity and have the ability to utilize your phone and join us.
- 0:56:38 So colleagues, as I was stating, we're going to have each of the taxicab operators state and testify and then at the end we'll just go maybe a five minute round or a ten minute round given the time. And Ms. Gumbs, just be on the alert that senators may have questions to ask you as well. Mr. Stevens kindly present your testimony good evening Edwin Steven and good evening to the general public that is listening so I want to state to the also to the public and also our customers that relies on taxis to bring them to and forth to run the errands also to bring them to work in the morning also an evening while we do have a shortage of taxis here on St. Croix and one of the main reason is the issue with the corona virus wiped out a lot of our drivers and also a lot of driver did retire also and with the government not issuing the taxi examination also put a dump on our taxis around here so we're very short with those taxis also and that's why it's taking so long for those passengers which we call the road runners to get to and from work. Now they also need to understand that a taxi, they also need to understand that those taxis have a different plate than private cars, okay. Those plates, those taxis come with a medallion and with the medallion the plates match every medallions. The medallion has to be bought from about \$15,000 in St. Croix, maybe about
- 0:58:32 \$30,000 in St. Thomas, \$35,000-ish, and about probably \$40,000-\$45,000 in St. John. So when you're catching a taxi, if the vehicle doesn't mark taxi, then that vehicle is illegal. It's not a taxi. And the reason we do have those plates is a screening process. You have to through a process before you can get a taxi or a taxi license so you do have to have a taxi license in order to operate which is a class c uh license in order to operate an automobile for hire in which we uh fall under so i just want the uh public to understand that which majority or 90 percent uh don't know uh that those taxi has a different plate on them so we do go through a screening process where the government do know us meaning uh they know your criminal background when you do go through uh that screening process also i also want to jump to with the uh those uber that we or uba that we do have here at st croix uh which get very aggressive with the licensed taxi driver and

even want to cause bodily harm to those taxi driver on our own legal taxi stand that we do have uh you may be surprised but this is what is happening here so the taxi have been very factored here in St. Croix. It's a survival business and also I want the people of the islands to know, taxi is one of the last remaining business that local people have along with fishermen and a little bit of trucks and one ice cream store. Okay so it's slowly trying to be taken away from us again. If you're working under Uber you're working for someone. When you have a taxi you're your own independent taxi driver and this is why in the 70s uh the senators back then passed a law with a cup of two medallion uh to avoid people coming and capitalize or uh monopolize the taxi industry in order to give the local people at least something to have here on the island to

1:00:35 have the ability to survive i have a own a business here on st croix taxis run differently on St. Croix, St. Thomas and the Three Islands over here. Some people might be in favor of Uber. You have to bear in mind St. Croix does not have 3 million people. We only have about 45,000 people here on the island of St. Croix. It's not enough to go around with those Uber. And those Uber drivers could easily come under the taxi industry and also the government will make money also. Some of them don't qualify to come under the taxi industry and also most of the drivers, Because almost all the drivers on the road that we have here on St. Croix are trusted drivers that you can trust with taking you around also on the island. You really hardly have any incidents with any drivers here throughout the islands also. With the government not issuing the tests for examination, we kind of feel they're kind to sort of sabotaging, especially when it comes to the cruise line, we don't have sufficient cabs, then you want to try to push that Uber down our throats, which will solely diminish or exile the taxis that we have here on St. Croix and will be completely taken away from us also. And that's how we, the taxi drivers, are feeling right now. A lot of taxi drivers, like I said, have also retired. There's about a batch of 50 new drivers that want to come in to taxis in St. Croix, to run or operate a taxi in St. Croix. Out of the 50 drivers that may come into St. Croix, we may retain 30 of them or maybe even 25 of them. It's worth giving it a try to have these drivers in St. Croix. It's a long list. Nobody can tell us when they're going to have the test or when the examination is going to be given. Also with these batches, we have the most youngest drivers coming in to drive taxis. Before, there used to be more elderly drivers here driving taxis. Right now, it's more younger drivers, which also would be more innovative to the taxi industries also.

1:02:51 So to my general public, and also you asked about the associations here in St. Croix. Like I said, the taxi is so fractured to survive with taxi here in St. Croix. You have to jump all over the place. to survive. You can't necessarily stick to one spot to survive here operating taxis here on St. Croix. So to the general public also that catches taxis here on St. Croix, this is one of the reasons why it's taking so long for you guys to get taxis out there because of the shortage of taxis that we do have here on St. Croix because of not giving that examination here on St. Croix also. So right now I rest my case for now. Thank you so much Mr. Stevens and well said. And last but not least, we have Mr. Paul Robles, Roberts.

1:03:38 No, no, no, Roberts, Roberts, Roberts, Mr. Roberts. Well, good evening to everyone, it's a pleasure and a privilege to be here to address our concern and what's going on in the tax industry. The tax industry is a great industry, but we find out that in this time that we are in, we've been short-changed. It seems like we have no support, no one want to stand up and help, but we, we of ourselves, we're going to stand and we're going to fight for our own if we have to, because I don't believe that we can do it and we will do it, because it's time out now for we stop trying to figure out what to do, where to go, how to do it, because I've been in this business since 1996.

1:04:30 And this is the worst I've ever seen it. Very worst I've ever seen it. Because I'm not depending on, say, senators to do something. We, ourselves, will get up and do what we need to do when it's time to do it. But at this time, I believe we don't need to have no kind of Uber in the Virgin Islands, because taxi, if we get the privilege and the opportunity, as we should have always, by supporting have more drivers, open up the windows, have the testing going on. Instead of wasting time, we have tests this time, then they cancel it that time. We need to open the windows so the younger generation can come in, Because the older guys are dying out, and retiring. And the more younger people we get in it, it's better we'll stand.

1:05:24 And because we lack of young people, and we're not giving them the choice or the opportunity to come into the industry, that's why we face the problem. Why they say about Uber? But Uber will never solve the problem. We need to help the young people to get in the system, to learn the system so we can move forward with this taxi industry. It's too many times we're leaning on somebody to help, but I believe that we within ourself as taxi drivers, when we shake out the dust and get up and do what needs to be done, because I want to say to everyone in the community, we have a vote in black. We don't need to challenge you or threaten you about we can vote. We don't need to go that way. We believe that we have enough power and authority in this place that we can do what we need to do when it's necessary. So we need the support, we need the help for you all to stand and give us what we need.

- 1:06:24 Stop talking about Uber. We don't need no Uber. We just need what we need, the tools, the materials to fight this fight. And the tools we need right now is some more drivers, more respect, more honor, more dignity, because we are the first that anyone meet when they come to the island, and the last when they leave the island. So I believe everybody in the community and around need to support the drivers. Because no matter how much cars you have, your car, sometime, and whatever time will break down. And the first person you always try to get, not your friend, not your cousin, not your uncle, you always try to get a taxi to take where you need to go so you don't want to bother your friends. So why can't we get the support? By getting more drivers, younger people in the system to get the system go forward. Because where I sit right now, taxi is better than any Uber. We could do that job better than any Uber. But the problem, they're disabling us because they've seen a way where they can hide the cash, where they can cover the cash. Because with taxi, you gotta pay all these fees, all these fees. And these look like nothing.
- 1:07:40 But I believe, with all your help, doing what you're supposed to do, and we doing what we're supposed to do, we can make it. We don't need no Uber, because Uber is just a game, mind game. Because every driver now, presently, is respected and is honored. Go around the island, people might say what they want, say what taxi drivers? But I guarantee you, you will find five out of 10 will say they respect the drivers and what the drivers are doing. So we need your support to add more drivers, give us what we need, and let us do the job the way the job should be done. Because we're the first and we're the last. So stop talking about this Uber, let's organize this thing right, get the taxi commission the way it should be.
- 1:08:26 No DLC, DLC is a rip off and I could tell you I've been there scratch and I see what things going on. There's some leaders being there years through the years just take the Mad Islands give the friends. We need to fix the taxi industry. It's not hard. Why can't we as taxi drivers choose who we want to be on the board and present it to the governor whoever? So they could send that forward. You understand? We choose who we want to be on the board send it to the governor and send it forward, and the senators approve whoever it is. That's what we've done. Not no governor choose for us. We need to choose who we want to lead us, and the board, and as we call as a cheer person or director, we call it, then send that election to the governor, then the governor send it to the senators, and we go from there. I think that's a better way of doing it, and to support, because this is the last and the best, thing ever happen as we as black folks to continue the tradition and the legacy of our ancestors instead of just giving it away for nothing. Let us do what we need to do, support this right now and not tomorrow, but get us more drivers and let us form what we need to form, our togetherness, St Thomas, St John and St Croix, and choose who we want. Elect who we want to be on the board and who want to be for the chairperson and give it to this governor and the governor give it to the senators and the senators approve it not no governor choose nobody for us he don't know nobody we know the people we understand the people because we all work together live together and we'll be a better taxi division so let us walk together and get this thing doing that need to be
- 1:10:19 done because if not we the drivers will do what we need to do we're not check me out we just go do what we need to do and we now have to say when the election election is not the game we just need to do what we need to do but which you all support this thing could be better if don't you you know have something working and you can just throw it away say you change it because yes it's working but we need to give what is necessary what is needful to that department to whatever structure to make it better so stop this nonsense. But Uber, we're not hearing about Uber, taxi. Our ancestors started, let's continue the job. The problem is, we don't have the tools.
- 1:11:01 The tools are more drivers. So let's get the program together, get more drivers, get this testing thing done, and stop playing around this place. UVI in this, let's get it done. Get drivers in, and let's see a better future. And stop wasting Uber. Thank you very much. We should hear that. Thank you so kindly. Mr. Roberts is noted with all of your comments, and some of them are very valid. Ms. Gumbs? Ms. Gumbs? You have listened to the testimonies that your clients here and our constituents have indicated. We are going to, I don't know if you want to feed in at this time, but I will begin by allowing my colleagues to ask some questions of the testifiers and you as well.
- 1:12:05 So just be on the alert. need to unmute your phone yes good evening good evening good evening everyone to my testifiers to my industry operators welcome and i feel your passion and though it's only three of you your voices are being heard and i hope that we can get the assistance that we need we must all remember it takes two hands to clap and the taxicab commission need much funding in order to be effective so senator if at this time you can grant me i would go ahead and respond to um uh I think, Samuel Ferdinand.
- 1:13:03 You may proceed, Executive Director. Okay, in response to, I was taking some notes so I could remember, in response to Samuel Ferdinand, also known as the Mighty Pat, hey Mighty Pat, how is it going? I've been reaching out since January of this year via phone and having personally to meet on the street with Commissioner Martinez for a sit-down to see how we can get us some assistance, especially in the St. Croix district, knowing that we do not have any taxi enforcement officers on that island. I've reached out again in February, and to date, I am still awaiting. After being assured, yes, I'll

have my secretary call and set up a meeting so we can sit down and have a discussion as to how we can approach this. I am still waiting.

1:14:07 Ms. Gumbs, Ms. Gumbs, Ms. Gumbs, you weren't clear. You don't have any enforcement officers in the St. Croix district. Is that what you're saying? Yes, ma'am. Okay, and who are you waiting on? what are you waiting on so we're clear for mr martinez to meet with him to see how he could offer some assistance to us especially on the island of st crore and when you say mr martinez are you referring to commissioner ray martinez that's who you you you sent a letter to him no i reached out to his secretary to set up an appointment and i've met him on the street personally and had a conversation with him and he told me to call give his secretary the dates and she'll get back to me and i'm still waiting i reached out again in february okay speaking with his secretary um miss thomas and she assured me that she'll get back to me we are now in march and i am still waiting for that meeting to be had okay understood i just wanted some clarity thank you you may proceed okay another concern that the mighty pad had or put forth was that of the administrative fees the administrative fees that are currently in place to the best of my understanding with the exception of the business license which is 130 annually all administrative fees were increased on the then former uh executive director lovron sorrow without the board's approval so they were in effect from i think sometime back in 2015 2016 to present and yes he is correct when he states that uh i'm not sure what it was prior to the 300 increase. But if a lease is late, you have a grace period of five days to come in and pay. If you come in after the grace period of five days, automatically you will charge \$300.

1:16:26 And for each additional month that is late, an additional \$50. so those are those those fees are in fact in place currently i think mr is mr stephens did i did i get copy that done correctly you're correct mr stephens was speaking about the classes and the like at uvi the taxi classes yes miss uh so so the board the board and i along with our partners uh tourism and uvi cell we have been having meetings uh most recently a week and a half ago in an effort to to finalize the details of resuming those taxi classes one major um delay i do believe is attributed to not having um promulgated rules and regs in place so that those persons attending um these these classes are knowledgeable of the rules and regs that governs the industry and that they must abide by to avoid any enforcement of citations or the like by our officers mr stephens also talked about the um the limos and of course it's no secret that you know they they are running uh industry to the ground and we have been continuously asking i know um i have been in meetings with with den the director i think his title was who is now assistant commissioner graham for for the lemos to be returned under the taxicab commission yes by law the law states currently that they are not automobiles for hire but if they're not automobiles for hire then what are they why are they then out there intruding and crouching on the space of of taxi operators why are they down in the ship areas i know during one of our board meetings there were um a participant because our meetings are open to the public when we have board meetings who ask to see the rules and regs from dlc that the promulgated rules and regs that is that governs the limo industry and we're told that uh commissioner assistant commissioner graham is working on it to date and to the best of my knowledge no rules and regs have been presented

1:19:46 So it's not that the Taxicab Commission is just sitting idly by and not trying to work to get the limo industry placed back under the Taxicab Commission. I know when I came on board, Senator Blyden visited me here in my office and stated that he has the bill to bring the lemos back under the Taxicab Commission, and to date, we are now in 2023, and I'll be approaching my second year anniversary, and that bill still has not gone anywhere what is the whole up i'm not sure and i think i think that's about it for the that i covered so far from um the testifiers and responding to their concerns that they put forth okay thank you so much executive director gums at this time i will recognize senator diane tk part center k part you may proceed with your line of questioning thank you madam chair and to good evening senator kala joseph and as i mentioned earlier thank you for this opportunity for us to hear the taxi men that are before us today mighty pat mr stephen mr roberts i know you guys have been in this industry as someone mentioned a dying industry um i can remember as a little girl jumping on a taxi bus from arthur richard's aloui

1:21:39 to christian stead and i could select which taxi i don't wait for which one got the best reggae which you know don't make nonsense tell the passengers where to go where to sit because you know there were rules and as time and time goes by i don't see taxi drivers on the road covid comes and this impacted you more than ever my first question is during that time you had no choice there was no kind of income if you had other income it wasn't the taxis right did you receive any subsidies to help you yes if you can state your your comments in the mic and identify yourself when you answer my name is um my depart yeah we receive some money from unemployment with not a big deal so you receive unemployment okay so this was for how long did you receive it for six weeks or something like that okay it's a couple of weeks a couple of weeks yeah I was the last one to get because I mean those guys didn't like me and I tried the best not to give me because we'll talk about them I mean be honest with you this guy laughing back here but the good part to make sure that they didn't get I had to go to court really sunny to court really in order for I to get everybody's forgetting asked to me because they say I was in the with the government, the governor singing and the governor and all these kind of

different, these stupid, I mean, petty, petty things, you know?

- 1:23:32 So I was the last one to get, and I get, I mean, half of what the other people got, because it was already getting, so they just pushed me in there, just bust me off, because, oh, he was singing on our governor, he ain't supposed to get no harm and employment. Give me a break, you understand? That's me, and that's your thing with me. So you feel like you was, it was a personal thing? I was bushwhacked, yeah, put it that way. Well, I hope that wasn't the case, but as I hear you guys today, you know, I have so many questions, and you may not be the individuals to ask, but some of the questions that I want to ask.
- 1:24:11 I heard that there are no enforcement officers, so you're saying, presently on St. Croix, there's no one to inspect the the taxi drivers to issue any issue any kind of traffic citations for unauthorized operations of a taxi driver that is true that that is so true i mean and it's for a long time not just now i mean you should talk to miss gums about that really but okay okay so yes i'm going now to miss gums because you're the one that mentioned there are no enforcement officers on the island of st croix how long has this been okay that is effective that became effective august 31st 2023 when the one officer that we had in that district resign due to age the age requirement and uh let me ask how many you have on saint thomas two because i was going to say hey probably you need in the meantime in the interim probably you could have that pause and travel to saint croix you know have some presence but But obviously, it needs to be some regulation going on. And the taxi drivers, you have a responsibility of having your personal identification, your taxi license to be displayed on top of your roof, on your dashboard.
- 1:25:50 Is that correct? Correct. That is very correct. So these individuals that are doing unauthorized transporting, you're saying that they just pick up individuals and they're taking the passengers who you pay insurance, right, to have these people transported. So there's no regulation, so it's just like the Wild West. Interesting. because they do as they like so I'm a creator scenario I'm a tourist I come to a hotel and I need transportation what would a tourist do is there a number that they can call and they call a licensed person and now I'm hearing that they call in unauthorized vehicles it's almost all the um all the hotels we gave them our cards and numbers they used to call us but since it gets so rampant with calling anybody the people at the desk is calling their friends people are working with the hotel is driving taxi you know even somebody hotel workers are taking a little time or to take the people in where they want to go only when they can't find these guys are they're too busy they'll call a taxi do you have any like official taxi stands so I say I'm staying in in the town of christian stead or frederick stead i'm a tourist can i go to an identified area that says taxi stand yes that's on king street but it's really it's really to us everybody stand because the motor cars are being living on your head i want to know is there a sign that says taxi stand
- 1:27:39 yes is there one in frederick stead there's none in frederick stead no so tourists come off a boat in Frederick Stead it's just the norm that the taxis would line up and is there an order as to who would get these first set of tourists is there order yes there's a harder because the arm the tourist ship have its own buses which is the these guys that work with the ship now these guys the one who didn't book the tours with the ship will come on the outside and they'll meet the independent drivers so before the ship even come here they know how much people that bring in and there's a what what's your company island network work inside they work with the ship itself prepaid they call it prepaid so they don't know much people come in and they got the taxes in there already to carry those people that are booked on the ship itself now those who decide well we're not booking on the ship we want other taxis we are on the outside right there waiting on them to come out and deal with us so they'll say we need a taxi we need a tour we need to go to town we need to go to Cane Bay and these different things on the outside thank you for that because that just had me to thinking now the Virgin Islands Port authority recently did a training am i correct for taxi drivers and once you attended that training you were supposed to be presented like a placard that um i get this stamp of approval from the port authority from the the cruise ship that this driver is certified to to take up passengers did you guys take advantage of that we did it but we never got we never got the um
- 1:29:34 stamp to say we did it every um as a matter of fact will john say he was supposed to keep get together to give everybody the stamp it never happened but we all went oh interesting so so you need to get those placards from or whatever they call it to say that you have a stamp of approval yes we have to pick up a valid valid tour guides that's what I did okay but madam chair I know we don't have a timer yes so I am you time in me I'm asking my colleagues to be okay I'm very much considerate because we should be in here the meeting ends at 8 o'clock and I don't want to go I was longer than 830 I would please we started a little late thank you madam chair so I would just say that I hear your cry I hear your pain and if there's anything I'm not on this committee but I thought it was very important to come because this is an industry that I know is dying and I would want the taxi men and women of St. Cory particularly to be able to continue this industry for you guys to be our forefront of when individuals come to take them around to teach them the history and of course knowing this industry from inside out so madam chair I just look forward to amendments and improvements or

challenges that we are able as a body to affect this change miss gums you can also depend on the legislation if there are amendments that we need to work on that we may not have thought about please do so I stand prepared to assist this dying industry thank you madam chair thank you so much

- 1:31:37 Senator Capehart and some of the comments regarding the limousine for hire those amendments have been put in I know I put in one and it was I was preempted so another senator has authorship over them because we are listening and we are working on your behalf at this time I wanted to recognize non-committee well committee member senator Samuel Carrion he has joined us. So Senator Carrion, welcome and thank you for joining us here this evening. At this time I'd like to recognize Mr. Majority Leader, Senate Kenneth Gittins. Senator Kenneth Gittins, you are recognized to ask your questions. Thank you, Madam Chair, and good evening to all again. I'm not sure how many questions I'll have but let me first just commend the three of you for coming forward and being the voice of the many and to also applaud the other three or four that's in the audience. Now one of you sat here and spoke about the industry coming together, St. Croix, St. Thomas and St. John. But my one question would be, where the rest of your St. Croix colleagues? The last time they had such a town hall meeting in the St. Thomas and St. John district, the place was overflowing with taxi drivers and their concerns so again I applaud you guys for coming forward but let you others know they need to step up as well now on another note we have the taxicab Commission representative here on the other hand stating that they're reaching out to the police commissioner for assistance and one at a police department shop for manpower to DP and
- 1:33:28 are strapped for manpower everybody's shot for manpower so the taxicab Commission have to hire enforcement officers that's how they make their monies through their administrative tickets etc so if they don't have nobody on St. Croix how they gonna fund the office they're gonna have to continuously come back to the legislature now for additional funding so we have a problem the other problem that I'm also seeing is again and most of you brought it up the problems that you're talking about excuse me that you're talking about is an enforcement problem so the to the part of the solution will be to simply enforce what's on the books but who is enforcing obviously nobody it even sickens me right now and trust me as a former law enforcement executive I prefer see the guys selling coconut and and and sugarcane or whatnot on the side of the road don't get me wrong but do it within the confines of where you're supposed to go I don't like to see me passing by a bus stop and they have the truck and everything set up there in the middle of the bus stop where a bus is supposed to stop to safely let off a passenger and you can't do that you got to stop in the middle of the road to allow them to come off then when somebody get run down who's liable all this is what we're talking about when it comes to know between a taxi driver and a uber driver no uber there's no uber in existence in the virgin islands in the virgin islands code to my knowledge some people that might be looking or listening to this proceedings might be wondering to what's the difference between a taxi and a uber so let me know if I'm incorrect but the traditional taxi is typically regulated by the government and you have fixed rates correct you could normally be flagged
- 1:35:58 down on the road or even have advance notice of a pickup someplace to include the airport and the hotels that you're talking about correct so far but whereas a uber on the other hand operates on that different business module where they use a technology platform by way of a smartphone to connect their drivers with the passengers but both I would say are vehicles for hire it's the same thing now with a taxi I mean with the limousines that we have people now going under the radar to go for a limousine business license unable to get 10 15 even 20 a whole fleet of cars and just do the same thing that you're doing is that fair to you guys in the industry no it's not now i too uh i just heard the chairwoman said that she submitted legislation i too submitted uh legislation back in uh september 2023 i was told that i'm preempted and i'm going to have to start making some noise to ask the senators senator or senators that's sitting on the legislation to get up off for what it's sitting on and let's get this legislation moving because it is crippling the industry next month government officials again getting ready to go to the sea trade conference what I don't like is to be there and see all the other Caribbean island stakeholders government and officials yes but
- 1:38:02 inclusive of the private sector individuals there people restaurant owners taxi drivers those people doing the the how you call it they are the sightseeing and everything the tour guides everybody is there in Florida and engaging but for the US Virgin Islands only government officials are usually there we need to see some of you there so that you can understand why another jurisdiction have no taking the lead in being the top cruise lane tourist destination now and not no longer St. Thomas but we need to be there to be engaged again in looking to title 20 other Virgin Islands code that would speak to all this taxicab Commission and whatnot it is time for us to know change things up and have what you call the Virgin Islands taxi and limousine commission and to define what a vehicle for hire is and all that we're talking about limousine taxi even safari and uber every one of them are vehicles for hire I'm even looking at regulating and symptoms you have where you call where
- 1:39:54 you call them gypsy taxi that's also illegal my thing is is bring everybody under one umbrella and regulate them have a proper industry in place so that we can move forward hopefully we will get our act together but that's where I would say

that we have dropped the ball because we know that changes need to be made but on the other hand enforcement is totally lacking and we see why especially on St. Croix there's absolutely no taxi enforcement going on. Madam Chair thank you for this but again we're going to have to get with our colleagues and let them get up off of what they're sitting on with these drafts and move forward with it so that we can energize this industry before we lose it thank you gentlemen again for coming forward thank you so kindly mr majority leader this time i will recognize senator samuel carrion a committee member center carrion thank you madam chair and good evening to you my colleagues good evening to the members of the tax association that are here taxi drivers and the people of virgin islands I had to be here I'm sorry it was late I had a little car incident and a family member thank God they're safe so I left them safe and rushed over here because I think this is important I'm a member of this committee and this is a conversation we've been having for some time now we've been having some sidebars with the chair and others and so we understand how important it is for us

1:41:48 to listen to the needs that you guys have, and see how we can be able to assist. Now, I think part of the problem is that we need to take this industry seriously. And I think that goes from all level. You know, the government is responsible for it. Taxi Cap Commission is responsible for it. I think the associations also have a role to play. I don't think we could point fingers. think we all have even this body right have a role to play to ensure the success of the taxi drivers in the virgin islands and i agree my colleagues um those that have the legislation they need to bring it forward so we can make the proper amendments have a collaborative effort you You know, because I think this is so huge that not one senator should be able to hug this tight and hold on to it. This is something that we all have to come together. And just as we've done in the past with other meaningful legislation that requires some heavy lifting, I think this is one of those that we all have to put our heads together and ensure that it benefits the territory and benefits the taxi drivers. So this is my plea and my call to my colleagues, whoever has the proposed legislation, to let's come together and let's make it work. It's been far too long. We know there are some serious issues. We've been hearing about them. Let's get them fixed. Let's correct them to ensure that we can move forward. You guys are so important to the territory because of the work that you do. you are ambassadors of the Virgin Islands you know when it comes to our tourism industry you're basically one of the first faces that individuals that visit our territory see or the last face that they see the first and last apart from those that are at the airport so it's very very meaningful the work that you do and apart from because sometimes you speak about the tourists but for

1:44:02 ourselves it's important that we improve our transportation within the territory. So let me ask you, within the District of St. Croix, how many associations do we have? I would say, Edwin Steven, I would say about W1, which is the St. Croix Taxi Association, the airport. So officially, we just have one officially on St. Croix. But then you have several independent operators. Very well do you know how many you guys are member of association? We're independent. You're independent. So there's is there any member of association here present? You are? There's none? Oh out in chambers. That's for me. Okay. Madam Chair, maybe we could have somebody from the association. Yes, Sergeant of Arms, who is here in the gallery representing the St. Croix Taxicab Association? Sergeant of Arms, could you kindly escort the gentleman here in the black and white striped shirt and also the gentleman here in the colorful blue shirt into the well.

1:45:32 Have one sit here and the other sit here. Gentlemen, I know you're very busy. The meeting started at 6.30. But we are very thankful that you made time to come here. And the both of you are from the St. Croix Taxi Cab Association. okay so we already had uh the two the three gentlemen to your uh left uh testify and made some presentation so right now i would i would ask you uh to place your names on the records On the record, starting with you, the gentleman in the striped shirt. You, you're in the striped shirt. Okay, my name is Ames Joseph. Ames?

1:46:32 A-M-E-S. Joseph, okay. That's a very popular name. Thank you. Okay, and now the gentleman in the blue colorful printed shirt. My name is Bernard Felix. Please draw a little closer to the mic. It's not going to bite you. My name is Bernard Felix. Bernard Felix. Bernard Felix. Yes.

1:46:58 And what is your position with Mr. Joseph? Mr. Joseph, could you come a little bit more to the gentleman in the yellow? In the yellow. Yes. Okay. And, Mr. Joseph, what is your position in the taxicab industry? I am a member of St. Croix Taxi Association. I used to be an executive, but I dropped off on that. So I'm a member at this moment. Okay. And you, Mr. Felix? Yes, I'm a member of St. Croix Taxi Association. Who is your president? Mr. Arthur, his name is Mr. Francis Arthur, and he wasn't able to be here tonight. He has a slight problem, so he could not make it. Francis Arthur, okay, wonderful.

1:47:58 So either Mr. Felix or myself is represented. Okay, so we have to decide, both of you can have an opportunity to speak because we already started to question uh senator carrion would you allow them an opportunity okay um what what we're gonna do then is just have you answer questions and if you had a question center carrion i know you mentioned relative to the uh representative from the st croix taxi association so these two gentlemen are representatives so I'm sure you can

direct your questions to them sure how many members are in the association sir right now we got about seven active seven active active do you know the total then of membership and but we do have at least 70 members at least 70 members so 47 active and active is because of the dues that that they have to pay the association that's why and the others are inactive for not paying the dues no makes it's not because they were not in the dues other members have work elsewhere that's why we have best members okay all right and and share with us some of the issues or concerns that you guys within the association you you're here

1:49:43 representing the executive group from the association correct correct so what are some of the concerns or the issues you would like to bring to light well the problem that we have it is a wonder that all of us know happening in the Virgin, especially St. Croix. The problem that we have, we have exactly that, how we call them, can't remember exactly why should I say, but it is people that are not in the is industry coming to the airport and pick up people to take to wherever they need to go. And they are not exactly what we call taxi members. And it becomes a problem, it's curtain, St. Croix, or I would like to say the taxi industry.

1:50:52 And then we have a problem with that. But now if you notice that, I don't know if you folks are keeping in touch or whatever it is with the industry in the Virgin Island or especially in St. Croix. When we go, especially due to cruise ship, you can see what is happening down there, and it is not good. And that is hurting the taxi industry. In the taxi industry, we got members which are trying their best to do the best that they know how to do the business that they are into. But we got other members, or even members, I'm sorry to use that word, members, but they are not taxi drivers and coming into the industry and then really messing up the industry. And we are hoping the centers for the governor will help all of us to get the taxi industry going the way it should be. People or drivers I would say really messing up the industry and when they do people who do not know what's going on they say that they are taxis and they are not and that is really messing up the drivers or the industry anything else you want to say mr. Felix okay so your main issue is that individuals are coming in or not taxi drivers at the airport and what do you

1:52:45 on a case like that do you report do you take pictures how do you handle this situation well we have not done that but from what you're saying right now i think that is the thing that we should do take pictures and everything that we could monitor what's going on and then when we talk to the senators or the governor we could bring it up to them and they could see what's going on In order to enforcement, Ms. Gumbs, is Ms. Gumbs still with us?

1:53:18 One of the issues we realized is that there's no enforcement. So you have no enforcement officers on St. Croix. So really, the situation is really- I'm still here, Senator. Wild Wild West, because there's no one there to really do an investigation, to provide any citation so that in itself is a huge issue because there's no one really to regulate the industry at this moment what yes what do you just say is so amazing to know that you are hitting the nail right on the head whatever is happening to we the industry in st. Croix what is going on from what you see that is what is the best of the industry. I'm hoping that the Senators, the Governor and the officers that are in the industry or would like to be in the industry to see what's going on in the Virgin Islands in the whole will do something about it because it is not good. I'm telling you right now for the question that you're asking and I'm very happy that you're asking a question like the original government or the taxi commissioner to get into the industry and see what's going on and then they could do something about it because it is not good so let me ask all of you gentlemen that are here in your observation because you're in the middle of everything you're in the trenches what needs to happen to fix the industry what would you like to see to happen to fix industry what I'd like to see that the taxi commissioner I to be what I worked at the airport that's where I worked that's the only place you taxi and of course other people calls and then we are help to take them either back and forth wherever they need to go and there

1:55:25 is other industry, like guys in Christianstead, wherever they are located, that they could help. But whatever it is, right now, we would like to see government get involved, because it is not good. Whatever is happening to us, it is not good, if you don't know. For the industry they're not really into the business but what they do from hotels the hotels are asking those folks to get into the business and they are not into the business and they are not paying the government any taxes and then get into the business pick up the job that the tax is supposed to do and then we are just sitting in the back and why do you think that is happening lack of enforcement lack of enforcement is it a pricing issue because you guys are there so why are they leaning into an alternative service is it a pricing issue is it that that the taxis are not available and they have to end up seeking other means, or is just disregarding the law, period? Well, you see, as far as I see, you have a bunch of people out there who will not be ever qualified to be a taxi driver because maybe of the police record, the track, the record that they have, they're criminals, most of them.

1:57:11 they seek that opportunity to drive taxi because actually even if they say listen we have a taxi test going on they can't come because you have to got a police record to show that you're clean that's number one so that's one the opportunity that they sue now number two you have people are working in the in the hotels and take it for granted right that are

calling their friends instead of giving the taxi drivers the job they're calling their friends because there's no enforcement and they realize that there's no enforcement so they're taking advantage of that because there's no enforcement we try to take pictures of them we try to sell it to miss gums we try to sell it but she have nobody to enforce the law to help us you know we take up to today i take a picture of a guy taking up 10 people in the taxi stand with a rental vehicle as that's why i told him look this is not a taxi you know and i watched the guy and the guy watched me and they drive off 10 people that's i could have got them 10 people going with in my taxi right behind my taxi because they know there's no enforcement so now here what happened there's a bunch of people that live here now that they even calling people from united states of america to come here and work as taxi drivers illegal taxi drivers because they know there's no enforcement whatsoever there's only one police officer that'll be downtown helping us and she'll do a great job down there i tell her what she don't play so if the people don't don't hate her because she's doing a job telling you you can't park in the taxi stand and when that happens next thing you know they send us some place far off you know they don't want to in town anymore because she enforcing the law so this is a lawless country we're living in right now until we could do something with enforcement we're gonna have a serious problem are we gonna wait until a people person say put the driving taxi and a taxi driver kill each other to say well let's fix the problem i mean we always wait till we reach that point you know we just run uh point of inquiry senator gittins and then senator capehart thank you uh madam chair you know in addition to this uh enforcement uh problem that we're seeing

1:59:23 I am truly seeing a dangerous situation going on here right now. Based on what you all are saying, only God knows who these front desk clerks are calling. We are supposedly a tourist destination. What are we doing? What are we saying? So, my question to the association members and the Taxicab Commission representative, are you all meeting with the, or have you all met, is there any conversation whatsoever going on with you guys and the Department of Tourism and the Hotel Association and whatnot with regards to this particular problem because if the wrong person pick up somebody from a hotel, we got trouble. Is there any conversations being had between your entity and the Department of Tourism and the Hotel Association?

2:00:40 association just just yes or no I don't want to just just yes or no if you know it ain't happening just tell me no it's not no association I'm gonna assume that the answer is no so I'm telling you all that you need to have these conversations it is a dangerous situation happening and we don't want to see the ultimate all right so I will suggest that you take the lead executive director Gums on reaching out to the Department of Tourism and the Hotel Association and the hotel and restaurant associations and let them know that when they call for a taxi it should be a reputable taxi and all our taxi drivers are identified and known through the taxicab commission and even the limousine well that's that's a whole long shot but the taxi drivers are known through the taxicab commission and should have a listing at all these restaurants and hotels so that when they make a call on behalf of their patron that they know that you're calling a reputable taxi don't let me have to say I told you also thank you madam chair Thank you so much, Mr. Majority Leader. Senator Capot, you're recognized for your point of information.

2:02:30 Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm here asking myself as I hear these taxi men before us, Senator Gittins mentioned about having discussion with tourism, having discussion with other individuals. but have you had discussions the taxi association have discussions with your recent complaints of illegal operations and telling them how it's affecting you telling the Commission how it's affecting you guys and your concerns have this discussion been had been yes yeah we tried some pictures we think we take pictures of these people in action and we sent it to Ms. Gumbs, we sent it to all the different people in the tax industry. As a matter of fact, one time they had a meeting with the governor down at UVI and the people that represent the town, right, was there and they showed me the woman who was in charge and I told her about the problem which she said she was going to take care of so there was no official hearing to address this situation no miss gums my questions to you now earlier when you were speaking about the challenges you mentioned or did I hear that there was an increase by a director did I hear correctly yes in the administrative fees i was responding to the mighty pat concern where um he spoke about the three hundred dollars late i'm sorry miss gums miss gums you will have to put on your visual so that i have to get my phone plug up because i'm about my battery's about to die okay so go ahead but try to put on your visual thank you so miss gums

2:04:37 i just wanted to clarify what i heard so this increase it wasn't approved by the board yes or no that's my understanding from the board is that those fees were not approved by now was it approved by the former board before this current board took effect in 2019 there is no minutes that speaks to that so i can't say that it was in fact um approved by the prior board either so presently can you tell me how many members are on this board the current board has uh seven members currently of which six of them their terms there's uh serving expired terms until such time as their uh replacement is uh appointed by the government but one of the challenges with this board that is in place is oftentimes when board meetings are called there is never a quorum so nothing can take place well based on the vi code it says nine members should be appointed by the governor with the advice and consent of the legislature of seven members appointed three members

must be selected from the taxi industry one from each island who are active taxi drivers who own their taxi medallions can you tell me who represents from the island of st croix

2:06:27 from the island of st croix you have uh elizabeth watley i mean hanson watley and she represents the um but it said it said three members must be selected from the taxi industry one from each island so what you're saying that so from the taxi industry you have uh Sweeney Toussaint who is a taxi operator and he has been he is serving from since 2009 to present so he have he continued to serve an expired term. Madam Chair you just tell me about my time but with one question and not a can our homes just open because how often are they having elections because 2009 to present, I know Mr. Sweeney, great guy, but it's time for someone else to serve. Thank you, Madam Chair. Okay, thank you so much, Senator Capehart.

2:07:37 And the challenge, and I believe the taxi men here pointed out something that is very valid, and it's been resonating throughout these town hall meetings, is that we need more individuals who are members of the taxi industry to be on the taxicab commission. Ms. Gumbs, the chairperson of the taxicab commission, who is that chairperson? The former chairperson was Loretta Lord. She has tendered her resignation from that position and just served as a member. The interim, who is serving as the interim chair is the vice chair. Before you go on, when did Ms. Chairwoman Lloyd tender her resignation? This was back in February, I think.

2:08:37 the secretary sent out that information to the Senate president. Okay. And who now serves as the interim vice, interim chair, rather? Elizabeth Hanson-Watley, who was serving as a vice chair prior. How often have you met for this year, the commission? there was a meeting last last week Tuesday or Wednesday you had a quorum no what about in January that was the only meeting you had in February did you have a January meeting no okay so we are looking at a possible dysfunctional Commission I don't want to say it but it looks that way one one of it is and that's why I've had these these town hall meetings because I know the solutions is here with the taxi operators and you what you have said this evening has been said in St. Thomas as well as in St. John believe it or not they mentioned regarding getting more taxi operators to be on the taxicab commission so my charge to you gentlemen this evening is to get your members your individuals you know please send up their names you can send it to any of the senators you could send it straight to the office of the governor or even

2:10:21 miss gums you need to definitely put together your resume and send that up so could get this vital board populated with current members who have the heart of the taxicab industry at the forefront okay because that's this is the only industry that we look at that look like people who we know or who who this is the only industry you know in the virgin islands the number one and practical only industry in the Virgin Islands that has people and is led by people, served by people who look like us. There's a gentleman here who has my same last name. Okay, this is how powerful this industry and how much it means to us as a people. So you need to do that. That's the first step I would encourage you to do. I don't know everybody in the industry. I have some names. And the next issue is the enforcement. Again, that was there in St. John. St. John, your brothers and sisters in the taxicab industry in St. John said there's no enforcement. They don't even have an office that they could go to to receive service. They have to go on a boat to St. Thomas, drive all the way to the western side of St. Thomas to receive service. You're hearing me? And it should not be happening they also mentioned about the limousine for hire they mentioned it again all the time everybody's mentioning is these are the same things that we are hearing critical to get this industry up and running our majority member mentioned the seed trade i had encouraged in the St. Thomas District, members of a taxi association, because theirs are more robust to definitely make an effort to go to some of these sea trees so you can make contacts, you can start to do your own business there. You have to be at the table. This is an opportunity for you to be at the table and to express what is needed. You guys are the experts in this industry i surely am not i'm not going to sit here and play as though i am the expert i don't all i don't do is call a taxi or when i managed a program i had the good mr ferdinand come and provide transportation for our young people i didn't hire a drive-by operator or limousine service we use a legitimate taxi operator and why for the

2:13:16 same reason that we needed to have a level of security we needed to be legitimate in what we were doing I was spending federal tax people money and we had to have that level of legitimacy and so these are persons who are operating. I don't know about anybody here but I am alarmed that the hotels staff is calling people to come to pick up our guests in the Virgin Islands and take them places. Suppose something happens to them then we are on national news. This is a major issue. This is a major breach in security and safety of our visitors. It's like somebody coming into your home, my goodness, and you don't even know who these people are. So this is very alarming. I want to ask Ms. Gumbs a question. Ms. Gumbs, has any individual retired from being a taxicab law enforcement officer in the St. Croix district?

2:14:25 Have you had any retirements in this fiscal year? Have any, say that? Has anyone law enforcement retirements in law enforcement in the St. Croix district or resignation? From our, from Taxi Cap Commission, the one enforcement officer, yes. I am not aware of anyone else. Okay, yes, retire or resign this fiscal year not in this fiscal year because it's in last

physical year 23 we only had one operating out of St. Croix okay one and are you looking was it a retirement or was it a resignation retirement okay and are you looking at Any additional staffing? I know you mentioned in your testimony before this committee in December, I believe, that you had requested another allotment, an increase in your allotment for fiscal year 2024?

2:15:36 yes which have not been received and yesterday i was working well i'm working on my putting my personal listing and the budget together and i have in that which i hope would be funded to hire two uh enforcement officers for the district of saint croix and one additional for st thomas what about st john that will serve those in st thomas serve service st john and st thomas okay because st john i don't mean to diminish the importance that whoever you hire as the taxi uh enforcement officer will need to be stationed in st john based on their needs. So our challenge with that is that we haven't been able to find a location. When I do travel to St. John, I would use the DLCA office if one of their employees are out of the office because the space is so small. That's a conversation. You're part of the executive branch. That's a conversation you could have with them and also with the administrator of St. John to find some interim space so that the taxi cab... And I have, from the time I came in, I have been doing just that. And not even in her office is there space. I've been literally through it up and down in St. John trying to find a space. Okay. I don't want to manipulate the issue regarding St. John and we're in St. Croix. I mean, I am very disturbed this evening when I'm hearing especially that we have operators who are picking up persons from they would rent a vehicle and pick up individuals from the ports and airports is that was represented yes so they are really being disrespectful and illegal and we have not yet been able to penalize them so we really need to be sure miss gums that we get all of that information relative to the cost for those enforcement officers tell me miss gums are you still

2:18:11 collecting our fees yes we are okay good in both island district correct okay now I wanted to really target a discussion that mr. Roberts you me because young people is my forefront of my heart and you said that it was a A number of young people want to come into this industry. Ms. Gumm, didn't you represent that you had already completed and finalized that agreement between UVI and tourism? Tourism had already finalized that agreement for the taxicab members to receive the training and the testing?

2:18:59 Yes. So it's finalized, but you just mentioned that you're still in discussion with them. So what is it? is it finalized to the rules the rules and regs that would govern the industry operators we have no rules and regs that have been promulgated and some of your colleagues have been you know reminding us of such what do we go when when an officer pulled over a operator who recently got um his his taking the class and we have no oh my goodness my battery died I'm sorry and we have no rules and regs to share with them during their class during the class time so that they are aware of the rules and regs that governs the agency so currently we are meaning us and and uvi the board and myself are working on the rules and regs which in turns would then have to go to uh the ag's office for legal sufficiency then have to be made public for 30 days and then on to the governor for signature okay now Now, I want to ask you, because you mentioned in your testimony in December that you have in-house counsel who was in the process of revising these policies and procedures and rules and regulations.

2:20:36 How is it the counsel hasn't turned out any of these things? How is it it's taking so long, are rules and regulations? You have something to start with, don't you? have at least a boilerplate something that has been there in place historically correct so the council was not paid and as a result of that everything came to a halt the council was in we were unable to we were unable to pay for the services rendered by council okay so what is the amount uh who did you communicate that to that you were unable to pay counsel for the services rendered. Did you talk to your liaison with the governor's office?

2:21:23 Or who did you have a conversation? I have been having conversation with everyone. The bills were submitted through the ERP system before the fiscal year ended. And I guess as a result of the government's slow cash flow, our invoices were not paid. And what is a total invoice? This was relayed to Government House, to, you know, been in conversation with. Excuse me, one moment, Ms. Gumbs. Ms. Gumbs, one moment. What is a total invoice that is owed to the council? If I can recall correctly, I think it's upwards of \$8,000, or within that ballpark. Okay, so that's usually something that can be paid. And this council was under a contract with the Taxicab Commission, correct?

2:22:21 Yes, Senator. All right. I really have some concern because I understand the need for promulgated rules and regulations. I love rules and regulations and standards. I'm going to tell you, I love structure because it helps keep order and reduces chaos. So, and I love enforcement, too, because people, when you break the rules, you got to pay the consequences. And so that's how you change behaviors. So we will have a discussion offline, if you don't mind, Ms. Gumm, so we could have that discussion uh regarding the amount that is owed the council did the council ever produce any type of rules and regulations to you submit anything to you or to the board not to me and i don't think uh the board received i can't speak with authority on that But I know that the chair, the den chair, did say that he was working, and maybe she did in fact receive a rough draft. I can't say with certainty. Yes, because they should have at least submitted something if they have

\$8,000, or they may not if they had never received any payment, so they never received any payment at all.

2 : 23 : 53 they receive initial payment they they receive their um retainer fee initially and i think maybe one other small fee in between i would have to go through my records okay so i don't want to belabor that issue because you should have something and so you're you are representing that the taxi operator classes and tests cannot be conducted until these rules and regulations are completed and voted upon and went through the process that's what you're saying that's why we can't have any new taxi operators it's not that we can't have any new ones for i know we spoke with the um clc for government house and based on how he was guiding us in and providing some assistants as what would you say the what i'm sorry you said a c chief legal council clc okay okay go ahead i'm sorry correct so he said uh we may we should be able while we are working on um revising the rules and regs we may be able to to uh start the classes using the uh rules and regs of 2014 or 20 yeah i think it's 2014 okay so did go through um legal sufficiency but was never promulgated okay so if you can start those classes what's preventing you from starting those classes That's my concern because I've had young people who I know very well in the St. Thomas district and I'm hearing the plea from these five gentlemen here and I'm thinking all of them may be over the age of 40.

2 : 25 : 59 Mr. Joseph is raising his son even higher. You don't look at Mr. Joseph at all. Okay, so when can the classes begin in the St. Croix district so we could get some younger folks in? They are itching to train some young people based on what I'm hearing, and they're nodding their head in the affirmative. So again, some of the revisions that has to take place is, I know a tentative in our last meeting, a tentative time frame, I think, of May? Why so late? Why so late? Because, again, while we're updating the rules and regs, the current rules and regs that are in place does not address, for example, electronic payments. it does not address uh current issues that affect uh today's industry okay but i think in the interim you could still resume those classes so that you work on a still a cash by cash base um so that you get individuals there and i mean it's done things are done simultaneously so i'm thinking that you can but that is your call uh based on where you see senator if i may you you have to understand also the challenges it's not uh the board is responsible for the policies and procedures and the rules and rights and if they can't get a quorum to come together to ensure that okay yes we're going to vote and move forward with this then until that time nothing

2 : 27 : 53 can be done but miss gums you it's critical to have what miss gums you already have executed document you represented by between tourism and uvi to offer the classes and do the testing you you shouldn't have to wait for any promulgated you can based on and what council represented, work with that, and then work on getting your board to meet and to call the board members.

2 : 28 : 28 That's what executive directors do as well. You have to marshal up and shore up those members, even though their time have expired. But you, based on your representation this evening, You actually have a payable document, a document, right, and a contract between tourism and UVI, as it's been done in the past, to actually offer those classes. So why haven't you acted on it? You need to act on it. You have to act on it, even though it may not be the most perfect. Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good. That's all I'm saying. let the perfect be the enemy of the good and let it move forward and you simultaneously work on updating the rules and regs and whipping together your Commission that's just my unsolicited recommendation senator Gittins you are recognized for your point of information just a quick comment because you know based on our knowledge what we've heard before still hearing tonight that was still here tomorrow the bottom line is is that the taxicab Commission needs total restructuring and especially as it pertains to the board and we as a legislative body have a responsibility to address this and I will be contacting those senators who have authorship of this measure to bring it forward so we can work on it and come to some solution again what I'm seeing is a dangerous situation and I will pray that it doesn't become a national

2 : 30 : 36 embarrassment. Thank you Madam Chair and I'm finished for the evening. Thank you Al. Thank you so much Mr. Joseph you wanted to add something you're recognized. Yes I would appreciate to ask Ms. Gomes do you realize look at me look at all of us sitting here how long you think that we could be in the tax industry. Look at us. Say something to me please. How long do you think we could be in the taxi industry? Don't you think there is other young people that would like to be in the industry? And I know for a fact I got a son that would like to be in there I got three taxis and because of you guys are not getting together to get the younger generation into the business and he just can't get in there and that the problem is the taxi commissioner that has the problem why can't you guys get together and get the younger generation in there so like we sitting here could get out of it or maybe do it at least part-time why do you why you all don't want to get together and get the younger generation in the tax industry let us know what's going on please I I agree that the industry do need younger a younger generation to come in before the older ones are all all gone so that they, the older ones, could train the younger ones and teach them. However, we also have to be mindful of the fact that during the time period of these classes, a lot of irregularities have taken place, which have led to the current audit by the inspector general's office and the AG's office that is currently taking place all

- 2:32:59 these things have to be addressed I just I'm sorry mr. Joseph miss gums I don't see how an ongoing investigation has to do with you offering a classes and putting in your structure as the executive director. I don't see it. I don't see how it interferes, right? This is a new class you're having. You could put in your structure or use all the structure. The issue with the last one based on the allegation, those are human factors. Those human beings may not be there any longer. So those are human. So I really would urge you and encourage you to put the class together and start to say and advertise that the class is being held because you have a contract. We're going to wrap up shortly. I'm going to recognize Mr. Roberts because he's been hair itching to ask a question. And then after that, I'm going to have each one of the gentlemen here close out with a 30-second closeout. and Ms. Gumbs, you will be allowed to close out and then I will say some final words. Mr. Roberts, you're recognized.
- 2:34:21 Ms. Gumbs, why are you trying to follow a parker? He's not going anywhere. So what you have, the instrument you have, use what is in your hand. Then afterward, do other stuff. But you hear following a parker? And we ain't going away. Use what is in your hand. Then after, you figure out what else to do. But stop following a parker. let's move on thank you so much um i'm going to ask starting with mr joseph uh you miss miss gums are you saying something because you're muted were you saying something you were muted okay she said no um starting with mr joseph i'll give you a moment 30 seconds to just say some closing remarks well what I would like to see as I said first if you we don't take of the younger generation to get into the industry we're gonna have a serious problem and like we see it is it is already a problem I ask beg of you young lady please whatever you got to do bring it forward to get the younger generation into the business if you don't the Virgin Island gonna have a serious problem and then what you know what's gonna happen everybody gonna into the business and what you're gonna see is the taxis and the taxis are gonna have nothing to do with that but they're gonna say in the taxes so I appreciate if you get into it immediately get the younger generation into the taxi business thank you and thank you so much
- 2:36:08 mr. Joseph mr. Ferdinand you're recognized for your 30-second closing remarks what I would like to say is that if St. Thomas having a problem with too much illegal taxi license they shouldn't be put it to blame on taxi drivers over here you could fix your problem over there but let us be free to do what we got over here because we don't have any legal illegal taxi license over here is the only centermes who have them so you all fix your problem over there and last but not least there's too much continental people that is driving taxi more than the people here i mean illegal taxi you know i mean they just come and they're just driving i mean renting cars and driving i mean how long we're going to continue to have these continental people taking advantage of us you You know, that's all I have to say.
- 2:37:02 Thank you so much, Mr. Ferdinand. Mr. Stevens. Please recognize Mr. Stevens' mic media. Go ahead, Mr. Stevens. It's on. I just want to say to administer simple tests, it's not, we're not sending a rocket to the moon, number one. And I also wanted to state it to Mr. Carrion. He asked the question why those people at the front desk calling the uh uber or whatever it is uh you have to bear in mind that a lot of people that moves here and know that we own these taxis they want it flush away from us okay uh if you tell a local person that you own a taxi it's okay but whenever you tell a tourist that you own that taxi all conversation stops so this is how they view us over here in the virgin islands yeah once you tell them you own that taxi the conversation stop so they feel as though you're not supposed to own anything so this is pretty much what happened on the ground so just letting you guys start and that's all I have to say and thank you mr. Stephens for sharing that mr. Roberts thanks for the time that you all came and spent miss this comes you need to wake up and let's get going because we're here with the energy and the knowledge to teach these young people so get them in so we go pass on the button to them so this thing keep moving the longer thing is more of us getting out of the way so get the test going then whatever you need to do after do after but stop follow a parka Ms. Gumbs we're recognized for your 30 second closing marks thank you senator let me first start by thanking our industry operators who took the time of this evening to participate in this town hall. Operators know that I stand ready and willing to meet with our senators to discuss and remedy the myriad of issues that the taxi cab is currently facing so we can move forward in a favorable way that would be beneficial to all concerned within the industry uh thank you so much ms gums um i want to just express my deepest thanks
- 2:39:33 uh to the taxi operators and their families who are here i personally handed out those flyers. I came over to St. Croix on a mission to make sure that you were represented at this Town Hall. It was initially scheduled for in February and I said mm-mm this isn't going to work I need to be over there to hand it out to the people on the ground because that's how I work. I work on the ground and I'm glad to see that we had some representation and I'm also glad, even though it's not good, we are one Virgin Islands. And what you are saying over here in St. Croix, trust me, I have my notes, was said in St. Thomas and St. John. Those items have been resonating, okay? And so we do have senators, especially with the limo issue, with the limo, the zine for hire has authorship. Senator Gittins mentioned he had put in a bill request, so did I, and we were preempted. We would have moved it. So we're going to work on that aspect, because that's legislation. The other thing I want to also thank is Media for being here.

- 2 : 40 : 55

They were here early for us to start on time, and I'm really grateful for them for being here and to get this town hall meeting in place. And last but not least I want to thank the senators who were here and present and found it important to be here in an attendance to hear what you the taxi operators have to say about your industry. This is our only industry that is managed, that is run and operated by people of African descent in the majority. We own this, we own this industry and it's very vital for us to keep that ownership. And also I neglected to mention that my staff I wanted to also thank them for being here and also the central staff security media miss Picard our protocol officer everyone I really appreciate that you stayed here it's Friday night and typically people have a lot to do on Friday night so I really want to thank you and give you my deepest thanks for all that you do for us as senators on behalf of the people of the Virgin Islands. The committee town hall meeting for Friday, March 8th, is hereby adjourned. Thank you everyone.
- 2 : 42 : 45

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. You

People named in this transcript

SUSPECTED, and a finding aid only. Names were matched by machine against the spellings used across all 426 of our transcripts, and the title is the one used in the room. Being named here is NOT evidence that a person attended or spoke - only that the name was said. Speech recognition mishears names, so a spelling may be wrong even where no alternative is offered.

- 6x

Senator Kenneth L. Gittens

heard in this transcript as: Gittins, Kenneth Gittin's, Kenneth Gittins
- 4x

Senator Diane T. Capeheart

heard in this transcript as: Capehart
- 2x

Senator Marvin Blyden

heard in this transcript as: Blyden
- 2x

Commissioner Ray Martinez

heard in this transcript as: Martinez
- 2x

Senator Samuel Carrion

heard in this transcript as: Carrion