



| Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance Part 2

Legislature USVI

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- 0:00:00 dedicated line where they can call in to voice whatever complaints they may have and so we can have someone there to respond timely. And finally before my time runs out you spoke about your strategy for envisioning a future for automobile for higher industry what would that look like what's your strategy so this is my let me just get so my strategy for for that as I stated in arm in my testimony you should not have the top of your head director I have so much going on in my head um at this point senator s i'm just trying to stay focused with with this with everything else that i have um going up okay i'm gonna have to speak into the mic okay the media so this is strategy currently one of our biggest uh problems within this is one minute one our operators who have passed on and their loved ones did not know business licenses are supposed to be paid or they're supposed to return their their license plates etc so it is the ability to communicate and have that information out there where they can go and be aware as to what is happening whether they are in tune with it or not even medallion owners who have it just sitting there and don't recognize that that even though it's not in you 30 seconds you should pay your business license every year failure to do that will result in penalties occurred okay let me ask you before my time
- 0:02:00 is so a web-based system with a dedicated line with business license do you have a record of how many people applied for business license and how many of those individuals were approved do you have a do you have a number no i don't have a number but a business license it's a one gets a business license a business license as a medallion owner or if that um license taxi operator is leasing time from the medallion owner correct so it'll be good to have those numbers too also and that's why i'm i'm trying to get all that information to build to build the database that that would allow us to see that.
- 0:02:44 MR. Okay. Through the chair, you can provide that information too. Okay. And thank you so much for your responses. Madam Chair, thank you so much for the time. MS. Thank you, Senator Blayden. I'm going to go to the next senator until I catch my bearings here. Senator Fonseca, you're recognized here, five minutes.

- 0:03:14 Senator Fonseca, yes. Thank you so kindly, Madam Chair, and a pleasant good morning to all the listening audience. Welcome, Ms. Veronese Gumbs from the Taxicab Commission. We give thanks and praises to the most high. Blessings, blessings. You know, Ms. Gumbs, right, I'm going to go to your testimony right here on page 12, on the last paragraph here. And you're saying here, the ability to innovate and adapt has become a crucial factor in navigating these challenges successfully.
- 0:04:02 The ability to innovate and adapt. You know, I am 100% in support of the taxi drivers. You know, this is a local business. We got to make sure that this business continues to thrive. I support the taxi drivers, and I want to make that clear. But I want to ask you a question. Do you think the taxi drivers and the ride sharing can co-exist? I do believe that they can co-exist if in fact rules and regulations are established ahead of time so everyone would know what their role is and what is expected of them.
- 0:04:51 To have them co-existing without having any rules and regs in place, we just provide chaos. Okay, because, you know, we support our taxi drivers. We want that business to thrive. That's how a lot of, you know, our family and friends, you know, have fed their family and, you know, been able to accomplish what they have accomplished. But remember the thing now that we call the dollar ride. You know, the dollar ride appeared and it's here to stay.
- 0:05:25 Now, you know, we got to look at, like you said in your testimony, the ability to innovate and adapt. This is your words, has become a crucial factor in navigating these challenges successfully. So you got to look at what's happening in the industry. Okay, so good. Let me go here now to your digital and other services, right? The total is 528,286. You want to get 479,486. You want to be able to store, collect, verify records. And that's very important because I just asked you a question about how much business licenses, I won't know how much leases you have and how many operators you have and you said you could not get your hand on that information. Because see, you are showing here that there's a total collections of \$345,651.017. However, they have on page 11, you have 1,964 medallions and the fee per medallion is a hundred and thirty dollars right yes yes okay so if you multiply one thousand nine sixty four by the hundred thirty you get two hundred and fifty five thousand three twenty that is your fees for all your taxi medallions but you have deposited three hundred and forty five thousand six fifty one so you have deposited about ninety thousand dollars more than the fees for all the medallions. So the difference in that is the leases and the operators. Is that correct? Correct. The other services. Okay. Tariffs and such. Okay. You have leases
- 0:07:13 and operators and then you have other services? Yes. What are the other services? so the other services would be um the what you call it the other services or your um certificates of entitlements and penalties and penalties okay good well penalties is by itself Okay, so through the chair, I need you to provide, through the chair, the total number of leases. You said the leases are \$75 per lease, right?
- 0:08:00 Yes, but that varies depending because you have some who have leases. No, I just need the total number of leases. And then I also need the total number of operators because you said it's \$45 per operator. Correct. Okay, good. So, um, that's a request through the chair. So now, how do you plan if you, you know, if you get this 479,486 for your digital digitization, how are you going to implement it? Do you have the staffing on board? It's going to be a hundred percent contract all outside. How are you going to implement that? at least for the first year it would be contracted you'll contract it out do you have a firm uh you've received time you've received it madam check and i finish up thank you man are you in the process of receiving bids you have a request for proposal prepared you have an rfq a request for quotation where are you now so in in fy 23 the board met we went through the process we had uh i think there And there were two vendors, and from that, they selected a vendor, a vendor was selected.
- 0:09:13 But because of funding, it was placed on hold. Okay. So you never received that appropriation? That's correct. Okay. Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Senator Fonseca. So you are aware that the Taxi Cab Commission is a self-sustaining entity, and the legislature only started to provide funding to this entity, I would say within the past three, four, about five years, about five years, because there was a project, there was some vehicles or something else to be purchased to assist the Taxi Commission but it was never the intent to continue to fund this without ensuring that the revenues were being collected so my question is have you true up the revenues for fiscal year 2023 have I chew it up you said yeah have you chew up the revenues of What is the total revenues collected in 2023?
- 0:10:25 What is the total revenues collected in 2023? I had a printout with that. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. I had a printout with that. So, in 2023, we had \$306,326.70. 306.
- 0:11:26 326. Okay. And 70. And 70? Cents. 7-0. Cents. Okay. I want to go back to this 300,000 you projected. What are you doing differently that will cause you to believe that you are going to generate another 300,000 dollars when in 24, 23, you only generated 306, 326, 70? Well, with the anticipation of being able to be able to go through all of our medallions that are out there to determine active and non-active and to reach out to those persons. Because a lot of them do not know that

they, even though it may be inactive, they're not using it, that they need to pay their money. Okay, so let me ask this another way. How many medallions we have issued in the Virgin Islands?

0:12:27 Territorially, I have a property Approximate, well I shouldn't say approximately, 1,964. 1964. Yes. Okay, so you have 1964 medallions. 1,964. 1,964 times 130. If everybody wants to pay, all you're going to generate is \$255,320 on time, right? And then you have the leases, which we're still trying to get from you. what that number is and you said you don't have that number that's correct correct so i'm still at a loss with regards to your 300 000 projection i'm is it that you're collecting back money is it that when they pay if they haven't renewed their license they have to pay it forward they have to bring forward all the years that they haven't paid Yes, Senator.

0:13:31 And is there an opportunity for, you don't even have information around how many licenses fall in that category, correct? That's correct, Senator. Okay, so what is it that you all have been doing within the past year and a half with collecting and compiling the data to at least look at a category? Because it doesn't seem like you have any sense of any category. So, outside of what we, the categories that we're inputted into the ERP system, there is really and truly no other mechanism in place to track the categories.

0:14:14 Okay. But you put it in the ERP, so you have that. So, you have that. Mm-hmm. And again, with a number of our challenges, we are behind in our postings to track. yeah it just seems like you're um how many people you have on board i have one admin staffer in st thomas one admin staffer in st croix and two um enforcement officers so you have two admins and yourself so what does what does a day look like for you so a day would look like for for me is being out there collecting alongside with the the um admin person seeing customers as they come in requesting information or needing assistance with responding to uh the ig office who we have the auditors that are physically sitting on our office sitting with them responding to doj who are doing investigations for our office so it varies responding to the different agencies in trying to to see what kind of help we can get but most importantly a day at times could be we just can't get anything done because of the fluctuations in our services in the office we mean fluctuation in service so let's take uh this week as an example and luckily for for me bit which was right there assisting with something else and i'm i'm cashiering and i'm running through the machine because we have internet services and nothing is happening it's not connecting and the technician came check everything while the internet is up it's and nothing is happening you run in the card nothing is happening So they were able to witness what I was saying firsthand

0:16:22 because they could not understand, how can you be there and this is not helpful. So you don't have, so your admins don't do the cashiering? Yes, but my admin person has been out sick and is still out sick for- Okay, so and that's on which island? St. Thomas? St. Thomas. So you have, how long has your admin person been out? She's been out, this is about two weeks now. All right, Senator Noel Francis Jr. recognized for your five minutes.

0:16:56 Thank you very much, Madam Chair, good morning to you, my colleagues, good morning to staff, good morning to Ms. Executive Director Gumbs. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. You Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. You Thank you. You Thank you. Thank you. I have not paid out any stipend to any board member.

0:25:17 much is owed to board members for stipends? I don't have that information as to how much is owed for board members. Senator, but I can get back that information to you. Is board members owed stipend? I do believe that they are owed stipends for during the first year when I was there and they had some meetings in between. And I know some of them were submitted. And if I may just close off real quickly, Madam Chair, I heard my time call. How are you receiving payments? Do you have a telecheck machine? People are required to pay by cash, check, money order. How are you receiving payments?

0:26:06 So we don't have a telecheck machine, but we do accept credit card payments. We do accept checks and we do accept cash. Thank you very much for my time. I've been called and I'll ask some additional questions in the next rounds if we have one. Thank you very much Madam Chair for the time. Thank you Mr. President. Senator Javon James, you recognize for your five minutes.

0:27:01 one second we're we're understanding that we are we need to shut down oh senator james is here okay there is we're getting information externally that they're they they're unable to hear what what we're seeing on the Senate floor. So we're gonna take a quick recess to regroup ourselves, so check what's happening on our media end.

0:27:44 The committee stands in recess. Thank you. Thank you. Let's go. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. Let's get started. the committee is out of recess hopefully the um

- 0:33:50 the community can hear our meeting now and it has improved Senator Diane Kiebardt, you're recognized for your five minutes. Thank you. Good morning. Thank you, Madam Chair. Good morning, colleagues. Good morning to the people of the Virgin Islands. Good morning, Ms. Gumbs. Good morning, Senator.
- 0:34:23 have a few questions for you and the testimony that you provided to us today I'm happy to see that you are working on your electronic management system in the world that we live in we have to be concerned once you're collecting information that there's confidentiality and integrity in your system you mentioned that you need four thousand seven hundred and seventy nine dollars four hundred and eighty six dollars thirty five cents how did you come up with that amount how did you come up with that quote in fy 2023 uh there was a bid that took place between we had two vendors and the vendor that was selected by the board provided that quote did you go through the process through pro like follow the process of property and procurement to send out that bid all of that process you went through? No, Senator. To come to this quote.
- 0:35:39 No. My understanding was that as a semi-autonomous agency, the TCC did not need to go through that process. So you followed your own internal processes? Correct. Okay. Is it a taxi software that you're going to be using? For the most part, yes. It would be streamlined to our needs.
- 0:36:17 You mentioned that the board met and continues to work on revisions, but you said that you have seven individuals on the board but it's a board of nine are you did do you have a quorum to vote on matters there generally there generally is a quorum now when it come time to vote in is there always a quorum for most meetings that I have been to they have not miss comes you're confusing me because it's either you have a quorum how legal is your vote when you vote because you have nine what what is the numbers for you to have a quorum so currently there's only seven members on the board so you would need a quorum of five when meetings do begin you have five members present there are times when one or two persons may drop off if a vote have to take place before the vote can take place so the quorum would then be broken what are you doing to fill, to get, are you having a conversation asking the governor that you need to fill these positions for the board so he can send their names down to the legislature? Because I keep hearing that there's no, you only have this amount of individuals on your board, then you see that you have all these positions vacant positions you have some very major positions to be filled what are you doing to fill these positions well we
- 0:38:17 need funding in order to fill those positions until we can identify funding then we would be unable to fill those positions you have two inspectors on St. Croix. Is that enough or do you need more? We would need more but at least to get us started and to help us start generating revenues it would help. Currently we have no officers on St. Croix. Currently you have no officers on St. Croix? That's correct, Senator. So does anybody from St. Thomas come over to St. Croix to do inspections? You have inspectors on St. Thomas, I should ask. We have two on St. Thomas, one is currently out on leave, so we're just one inspector at this time.
- 0:39:23 Do you think that the taxi industry on St. Croix is dying? Yes or no? It is not as robust as it should be. And what are you doing to help this industry? Because when I look at the deposits of St. Croix and St. Thomas, there's a big difference. \$55,000 for St. Croix, \$290,000 on St. Thomas, St. John. That's why I ask you, do you think this industry is dying on St. Croix? And what are you doing for the people, like taxi men and women on St. Croix, to make sure that this industry doesn't die so st croix is a big difference because of of the number of uh taxi operators licensed taxi operators that we have currently in st croix and after there were um a hiatus in the cruise ships going to st croix you did not have as many taxi operators out there um aggressively pursuing taxiing however within the last two years when the cruise ship industry start to pick up you have more operators now that are coming back out and more of them trying to get into the class let's start you just mentioned into the class what kind of training do you offer training to these taxi men and women for them to be equipped when they do pick up passengers that they are able to you know talk about the islands and sell the
- 0:41:21 islands and have correct information yes so that's that's where we are trying to resume those those classes however the key is to get the rules and regulation so that they would know what it is there's what is expected of them while they're out there the classes will be offered to the University of the Virgin Islands cell program would there be a charge to the the taxi men and women well the first with the partnership of the Department of Tourism for the first class that they take if they successfully pass it it will be paid through the Department of Tourism however for each time after that if they fail they would be responsible for paying to retake that class. Okay you mentioned on your last page that besides hurricane COVID that you also experience environmental issues. What are those? The mold issues in the building but we had to be shuttered for a couple of months. You mentioned also that you are partnering with the Department of Labor for a summer youth program to get four summer interns to put medallion owners and leases raw data into an Excel spreadsheet how many how many of these inputs do you need to put in well summer is almost over and I'm thinking are you still waiting for summer students are you going to partner with Department of Labor to get individuals to come in and do data entry because you don't have to really be a rocket scientist to put data into a computer so it's good that you were trying to

partner with labor but summers are most over so how many of these inputs and would you continue to work with Department of Labor to get someone to assist you because that's important yes senator so we have two students that have already started from the Department of Labor how many of these inputs you have

0:43:47 So, we have three, four huge books. I can't tell you exactly how much operators are in those books. But we have the old ledger books, the really old big books that we're using to compile the data from. And this data that you're trying to compile is the same data that would be protected with your data protection that you're trying to pay \$400 and something thousand dollars?

0:44:27 Yes, Senator. Madam Chair, thank you. This concludes my questioning. Thank you, Senator. Keep heart. I feel your pain. Senator Potter, you're recognized for your five minutes. Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you very much.

0:45:02 Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you very much Madam Chair. Good morning colleagues. A special good morning to Ms. Gumbs of the Virgin Islands Taxi Cab Commission. I know that the Taxicab Commission, relatively speaking, when you look at the other agencies and the government of the Virgin Islands, it's a relatively small agency. But I really believe in the overall importance of this critical agency, the Taxicab Commission packs a real powerful punch. And I say that because as a tourist-based economy, the availability and accessibility of high-quality taxi service is critical as far as an economic driver in our territory for sure. And we know just the whole image and reputation of a community is tied to the quality of a tourist destination, is tied to the quality of our taxi cab industry. And that's here, that's in St. Martin, that's in New York City. You remember the quality and caliber of the taxi service that you experience in a destination. I'm saying all of that to say that we really need to get it right in terms of putting the VI Taxicab Commission on a success trajectory in terms of adequate funding, in terms of adequate staffing, in terms of adequate leadership for the organization.

0:47:17 I think it is critical. Does the commission, and I don't know if you answered this before, does the commission have a standing quorum? In terms of the numbers. As I said earlier, Senator, they would start out at most of the meetings that I have attended with a quorum. However, somewhere along the line, in instances more specifically, when a vote supposed to take place, that quorum will be broken. Okay, so there are a number of persons, an adequate number of persons, who are appointed to make a quorum.

0:48:05 That's correct. But whether or not it's a functioning, effective organization, that's another, that's another thing. Correct. That's what you're saying. Is the Governor aware of that, of the struggles and the challenges you may be having to have a reliable and regular quorum for this critical agency? Yes, the governor is aware. As a matter of fact, we were poised to meet and everything was in place last Monday. However, due to an unforeseen circumstance, the governor had to cancel to reschedule.

0:48:42 Okay. So he's going to personally get involved and engaged? Correct, Senator. Okay. Excellent. How many taxi drivers, I don't know if you mentioned it before, how many taxi drivers do we have in each island? I could tell you based on... Oh, active. I cannot give you a specific number or any number with how many are active or inactive because we do not have any tracking mechanism in place that would allow us to identify that.

0:49:15 How many license? It's the same thing. I know, and someone spoke about rules and regs before, and I know that last time we spoke, the ability to complete the rules and regs was an impediment to us having persons, I guess, receive their taxi license. Not for them, well, for the class to take place. Yeah, and the class is directly tied to them getting the license. Yes, because if you're taking the class, they would need to know what is expected of them as an operator coming out to work in the industry.

0:49:52 What do you see as a time frame for us getting the rules and regs completed? And is that tied to staffing, or explain to me? that would be tied to us myself and the board getting together because i have in fact submitted the draft of what i did to the board we've since met and did not even get halfway through it yeah so it's it's about you know getting everyone together to set aside that time and dedicate the time that is necessary to ensure it can get and i'm asking you because Because it is such a critical thing, I know of two individuals who are trying to get their license going, very eager, very anxious, very enthusiastic, and they are just at a standstill because of the inability to us, Madam Chair, if I may just conclude, inability to us getting this train rolling as far as getting the rules and regs done so that the UVI cell class can be functioning.

0:51:05 It seems like we are at a standstill and it's really frustrating. He's calling me, saying, what are you doing, why we can't get this thing rolling, what am I going to do? thinking about leaving the territory because there is no estimated time frame that can be offered to him as to when this process will be completed and i mean can you appreciate his frustration i certainly i certainly can because again you know it's time consuming and you have to put the time in to do a quality or to produce a quality product so that you would not and it should envision um it should be very much futuristic and not just

say oh today and then we have to go back because you know lack of foresight we did not include all the other things that are on the horizon yeah that would have an impact in the industry or that is already out there that we are seeing in other cities and countries.

0:52:13 I think that this industry is too critical an industry for us to be at this standstill. I'm not blaming you. I'm blaming all of us. There must be a way for us to fix this industry so that we can begin to make some meaningful progress because we are at a standstill and I'm having some challenges finding you know whether my mind works you want to see okay this is a pathway to us making some progress and being successful and every step of the way it seems as though there are barriers to us moving forward singing Madam Chair. What is your biggest, just in conclusion, what is your biggest concern, your biggest frustration, the issue that if we could get beyond would make you feel as though we are making some gains in this industry?

0:53:29 So it's twofold like you just Elaborated on ensuring we can get the rules and regs up so that we can get these classes going and You know again to be able to meet the needs of those eager Applicants who want to get out there and you have those most senior operators Who want to retire but because no replacements is out there they continue to push forward and staffing you can't you can't do anything something like like this after almost four decades and i still can't come before you and give the necessary information because of no tracking tracking mechanisms that were set in place it's very frustrating do you need to contract out that task of getting that rules and regs done maybe contracting out to an entity and giving a specific time frame for it to be done because it seems as though substantial work has been put into it already so they may not be starting from scratch correct um isn't isn't that maybe a strategy that we can utilize yes so that is a strategy that i have been um again last this week here meeting with bit and they're physically coming now into the office on, I think, Tuesday or Wednesday of the upcoming week to see how we can, okay, start doing justice with what resources that we have and seeing how and where we can get additional resources until such time as we can get funding to digitize the entire office.

0:55:15 Thank you very much, Executive Director Gumbs. Thank you, Madam Chair, for your leniency. Thank you, Senator Potter. Dr. Gumbs, you know, you continue to say that you're unable to collect information because you need a system, and I have to differ with you. The previous speaker asked you about active and inactive licenses, and you have been there for two years, right?

0:55:49 Yes, Senator. So if you've been there for two years, there are people that are coming in to pay their registration. Correct? Correct. So don't you keep data on the people who are updated with paying their registration? I have a written tab. Yes. Yes or no? Yes. But it's not... No, let me finish. So then if you have that, then you share with us that to date, you share with us that You have \$345,000 that you've collected. That has to be inclusive of active individuals. You've been there last year. There were people that paid last year. You should be able to compile that information. You're talking about 1,900 individuals and you are basically hung up on this database that you need to have electronically when internally you can begin to collect that information.

0:56:47 You know, when I look at economies of scale, you are talking about us, the government of the Virgin Islands, investing four, five, a half a million dollars in a system to collect information around 1,900 people. Make that make sense for me. There is a way for us to collect that data internally in your office if you need assistance then we need to seek out the assistance from the individuals in this government or the entities in this government who can assist you or bring someone on to help you to put that database together but to be hung up on this half a million dollar project it does not bode well it doesn't add up two thousand under two thousand taxi drivers taxi not drivers two thousand medallions and we need a half a million dollar database think about it so you keep touting it and talking about it But at some point, you have to come to the self-realization that you have to begin to collect the information.

0:58:07 So when the senator asks you about the active, at minimum, you should have been able to give them the active from the time you were there, who's renewed their license. Since you were there, you just tell them, no, you don't have it. So Senator, to your point, I have been reaching out. And that's why I can say today that, come next week with BIT, that's why I can say that I have interns from the department or through the Department of Labor to assist me in ensuring that I can have...

0:58:46 But how are you assisting yourself? Yes. How am I assisting myself? again I would put each business license or Lisa whatever and yes I should have taken some time out and compiled each one individually to do the comparison but it's very challenging on a daily basis being out there among the employee doing and making sure that we could attend to the customers I have been displaced out of my office now for for some time due to a leak so I am moving around it's like it's so much that is going on senator it may sound as easy saying it but it's not a lot more to it to be physically there and see actually what is taking i'm just saying so you collect my money you write my name on a paper if even if you don't want to use a computer you collect the money you write the names on a paper and say these are the people who have paid this

year it's that die hard and that's what what I have been doing and that's what I just acknowledge that I did not take you know I should have taken it out and and separated by the varying categories to have it with me today so which I did not so so I can provide the amount of times that you have come here before us we've had this very same conversation over and over you did not walk away from the discussion recognizing that at minimum you not needed to start collecting that information because at some point you would have to come back to the institution, to the legislature for a budget review to have this discussion.

1:00:30 Senator Maurice James, you're recognized for your five minutes. Senator Joseph, you're recognized for your five minutes. a pleasant good morning once again forget you i just wanted to um first of all ms gums i've listened to the conversation thus far and i am a bit concerned about where we are looking to go fiscally with the taxicab commission knowing it is the only entity industry that is run primarily and owned primarily by local virgin islanders and so i do have some major concerns i want to ask you because it was mentioned earlier that you have a total of five employees including yourself that's correct senator has there been any employee uh that has resigned or retired from the taxicab commission within the last this fiscal year the 2024 fiscal year no senator okay now how much you mentioned the amount of vacancies that you have i'm looking at this would be page 10 of your testimony and you have some new positions you have positions classified employees you have it uh the amount is 167 234 dollars now does this include the fringe benefit do you have a breakout

1:02:22 including the the actual salary and the fringe because this is just one lumped money for the retiree no no no i'm talking about page page 10 follow me personnel services new positions this would be your second uh table here on this page do you have this broken out for us so you have just classified employee and how much how much is each employee paid and what is their fringe let me see if i have it you're asking for this money so we just need to get some details and the same will go also for the unclassified employee salaries you have that as 183 000 how much are you setting for the employee uh position how much are you going to pay them and what are their fringe and specifically what marry marry the the the salary and fringe to the positions so that we could have a clear understanding.

1:03:42 So we need a breakdown. And these are for the new positions. Oh, for the new positions, I don't have it broken out by, with the French, I can tell you what the salaries... okay would be yeah well share with us what the salaries would be because you mentioned you have some positions that you want to fill like you have here five positions of filled let me see six positions of vacant yes okay and so what i just need it to be a little bit clearer especially where you have your inspectors, your enforcement officers and your taxi inspectors. Those are the positions I'm really looking at and how much you are projecting to pay them and are you projecting a whole 100% for the fiscal year 2025 or you're looking at filling them 50% because you may get them filled by the half year of the fiscal year. So do you have that information?

1:05:01 So for the assistant executive director, SIXIFA. Okay. I really don't think that you need an assistant director. That's just my position based on your workload. I think the person who is the executive director could carry both island districts based on the workload because st croix doesn't have a lot but you definitely need the the inspectors and the enforcement officers because in the town hall meeting in st croix district the taxi operators stressed about a lot of illegal taxi operators um moving into their territory so that's some of the things i think need to be looked at on the front end and have prioritized so tell me how much what you have for your taxi inspectors and taxi uh enforcement officers so how many how many position how many positions would the enforcement you plan to fill three two for saint croix and one for saint thomas saint john and that would be at 44 000 for 13 and 91 cents 44 000 for okay and And two for St. Croix and one for Saints.

1:06:20 And how much would that bring you for the St. Thomas, St. John district? Because when the committee that I chair, we had the town hall meetings in St. John. That was also a major contention that there was an enforcement. And also our brothers and sisters from St. John had to travel here to St. Thomas to get their licenses, renewal, all of their work. And I thought that was very much a hardship on them because now they have to pay to come down here to get services. So that would bring it to a total of three for the St. Thomas, St. John. Okay. And how many office staff do you have assigned to St. John?

1:07:05 And how often do you go there? I know that's operational, but it plays into your budget because if you have to have staff travel from St. Thomas to St. John, how often do you do that? So when we had additional staff, when we had the admin sec, we used to try to go to St. John at least once every other month. Once every other month. You think that's sufficient? No, it's not. Do you have the number of taxi drivers in St. John that you provide services to?

1:07:37 Taxi operators? I don't have the amount other than the medallion owners. But operators would be, because you have the leasees are not involved. Okay. I know my time has been called. I just wanted to also get from you the cost for the enforcement officers, their fringe benefits. Have you pulled that out too? Because you gave me their salary, but I don't have a fringe benefit. So I'm going to ask you to provide that information through the chair. We need to get those critical

because lack of enforcement is a major issue that we have here in the Virgin Islands. and our enforcement officers need as we need as much enforcement officers as we can so if you could provide that to the chair thank you so much madam chair for the leeway thank you senator Joseph Did you provide me with your FY23 collections was 306.

1:08:56 Do you have a breakdown between your collections and all was collected and the different categories of the collections? know correct or 23 so are you collecting the categories this as we speak this year so but for 23 I have the breakout in terms of the commercial licenses how much we paid for the lease the penalty fines and so you're collecting that for 24 similarly so yes so so how much based on what you've collected for FY24, what's the breakout? You said you collected \$345,000 thus far, right? \$345,000.

1:09:53 Turns out \$45,000, right? Yes. So you have a breakout of how those, the categories those funds are collected for? When was the last time there was a class? The last time was in 22. The last class.

1:10:26 When did you say? I think it was March 22 or May 22. So the year is 2022? Yes, correct. And we have folks waiting who are interested in joining the industry. And what type of conversation are you having with the board with regards to the amount of interest that you're seeing? Because one of my colleagues asked about it being a dying industry. But it seems like what's happening at the commission is contributing to the dying industry in in st croix because if we haven't had a class since 2022 then how are we going to get individuals in the pool and so what we're saying that tourism is our made is is what i'm not that it's not what we're saying tourism is what drives the revenues that we have here in the territory for the most part okay um that's our major economic driver as we speak so if that's our major economic driver how is it that we the last time we had a class was 2022 what is what are your board members saying about this because if we are unable to get individuals into the industry then what we saying so i i can't speak on behalf of the board to respond to that but i can tell you what i did is i make certain that i put i dedicated as much of my time as i possibly could to ensure i could put rules and regs in place so that collectively we could meet review and

1:12:19 put it through the channel so that we can get these classes on board. Okay did you get the number for the 340 the breakout of the 345? So for so for up until June I don't have the breakout with me I just have up until January the second quarter just send it back to the chair send it back to the chair send it back to the committee Senator DeGraff you recognize you have five minutes good morning thank you madam chair good morning colleagues good morning testify all of you and listening and present Director, welcome. Bill number 35-0230, the bill for the 27-passenger safari is now law signed into law by the governor. It's now Act 8845, okay? So I'm bringing it to your attention. I'll make sure I get your copy before you leave.

1:13:32 Oh, I did get a copy. Thank you, Senator. Thank you. Okay, you know, the 24 budget as it stands right now, you have been, do you have a financial person? I don't, Senator. You don't. Okay, so you have been receiving the allotments to disperse for the 24 budget thus far? Correct, Senator. Okay, so the, and everyone has been paid and supplies have been addressed and utilities and everything have been giving you all your, so to date, what is your expenditure that you have received thus far for your 24 budget?

1:14:21 You have that information with you? I heard you say you had it, so that's what I wonder. Do you have those numbers? Or as of the latest, June, March? For expenditures? Correct. What allotment you have received thus far for these three quarters? Personnel, fringe, supplies. because in your testimony you have you have your budget overview broken down by personnel fringe vacancies, supplies, other services that you are requesting for 25. So as of June 2024 in total fringe benefits we have no, no, do personnel first Personal fringe \$167,027.17 \$167 \$27.17 Okay, 17 cents Okay, a personal fringe \$90,541.42 okay and and this is 24 okay supplies we don't have any expenditures for supplies on it no so only only personnel solid okay so only personal fridge you got yes correct okay so you are saying now for your supplies that you're requesting you're requesting five thousand two hundred

1:16:12 dollars for 25 budget yes for supplies correct what does five thousand two hundred dollars cover for the territory so it would cover uh toners copy so so then what you could do is the breakdown for your supplies the breakdown for your other services and charges could you submit that now to okay so we have that okay so now you are asking 1 million 555 707 93. yes correct senator right so it's if if if you don't get a financial person between now and your 25 budget means you are the person that has to control, collect, expend, all of these, that's what you are intending to be that person to take care of all of that right now. Can you handle that? That one million, If I take and I give you that \$1,555,707.93, I give it to you to get this industry moving, to get the organization moving. You don't have all the personnel you need. What does it do for the territory giving you this money?

1:17:45 Because now you become that person who have to deal with supplies, you have to pick up, You have to expend the money to pick up supplies. You have to store it. You have to do all of that. Can you handle this? Yes, Senator. Okay. So in you handling it from the 24 budget, in 2023, was a GS employee's wage increases? Were any GS employees ever paid

their wage increases in 23? Yes, Senator.

- 1:18:19 All of them were paid? Yes, Senator. Okay, I was told it weren't. Okay, so then in your 25 budget, are they budgeted for the 25 increase? Yes, Senator. Okay. Okay, I'll check on that to make sure. Now, in regards to your business licenses, business licenses, you have medallions, owners also end in, let's say we take a number, for instance, a month, third month. If they don't pay their business license fee by February, they get penalized? Is that so?
- 1:18:58 Yes, Senator. What is the penalty? \$50 per month. Okay, so if I end in a month three and I come to pay in three, I'm already in a hole for \$50? Providing you have your plates. If the plates are in-house, then it would be \$13 per month. So in other words, if the plates aren't active, and we have them for safekeeping in-house, you'll be paying \$13 per month for each month that is late. However, if the plates are in the operator's possession, whether active or inactive, we won't know because they have the place it would be fifty dollars per month for each month they're late right so it's it it just doesn't make sense that if i come to pay in the third month i come to pay my already in a whole fifty dollars because i was supposed to pay by the so is that a part of your rules or regulations or that's law or what is that is that a part of the rules and regulations? Well, I didn't see it in the rules and regs that I am I have been working on, but I came and made it as part of the day-to-day policy and procedures.
- 1:20:20 So you think that's fair? It's not from what I think, Senators, a lot of things. No, but okay, so just in closing, I'm saying, my car has to re-registered in the 10th month. I go in the 10th month and I register my vehicle. My driver's license is due in the 25th, 25 year, 25. I go and I register and I pay no late fees. But I have a taxi medallion and I go to pay in the third month because it's due in the third month, but I'm already in the whole \$50. So I have been in conversation with Director McIntosh because this is in fact causing a, according to the director, some challenges in their system.
- 1:21:08 Meaning that if it ended in a particular... Excuse me, just one second. I didn't ask Madam Chair if I could just come. Madam Chair, can I conclude? Okay, so I just wanted to be on the right side. Okay, so it really doesn't have to do with Director McIntosh. She's over the Bureau of Motor Vehicles. But I'm talking about the taxi owners, medallion owners, ending the third month, if they come the third month, I'm not saying they come in the fourth or the fifth month. Fine. They come in the third month when they are due. They come in their due month. They're already penalized \$50. But it's not in your rules and regulations. It's something you came and met. I think that's something you could fix.
- 1:21:51 That's what I was eluding to. Not only fixing, but it also creates a challenge with the bmv system that they use it but it affects your system for accounting okay when you look at a third month and you see this person have all these so that's what i'm saying fix that you don't need anything else to fix that so then now everybody coming in they're gonna be you're gonna be flooding you on the month they do because hey now they know okay i'm gonna be 50 in a hole i'm gonna come right now i'm gonna pay on time pay you able to be on top of that fix that at least for us if you at. Thank you for the time, Madam Chair.
- 1:22:32 Thank you, Senator De Graff. Colleagues, I don't know if anybody has a burning question that they wish to ask, but we are Yes, but we are about to wrap up this discussion with the Virgin Islands Taxi Cab Commission. One of the things that I need to get from you, from the Taxi Cab Commission, is the revenues that they've collected.
- 1:23:15 The funds that's collected goes into what account? The Taxi Fund account. Okay, the Taxi Fund account. Who's managing that account? Department of Finance. Yeah, but you have to be managing when you post, right? Yes. So we need to get the general ledger accounting of that fund for the past five years, so 2024 to prior.
- 1:23:47 So I did send you that information, Senator, back in April. Okay. You sent it to us in April. And I did verify with Ms. Russell that she was in receipt of. Okay. Understood. You have that report, would you? Do you have it on you? I just have my summary of, but I don't have the general ledger portion of it itself.
- 1:24:20 The printout of the general ledger. Okay. Okay, so based on the information that was shared with you from the general ledger report and the discussions that we had previously, do you have any information that was around what was collected in 2020? You gave us 23, 306, 326. What about 2022? Since you say you have a summary. 22 was \$374,578.
- 1:24:52 Mm-hmm, 22, 21. \$453,538.50. \$453,538.50. So that's one, two, three, 20. \$458,592. You have 19? No, I don't. Okay.
- 1:25:25 So, we started to see the falling off of the medallion, well, not the medallion, of the revenues rather in 2022. since then the numbers have been going south 22 was 374 23 was 70 70 almost 70 something thousand that was less and 22 give me that number for 22 oh no 22 374 374 578 and then 24 when I only have up until January that was 63 654 okay so 24 so so like up to now um so 24 your number is 345 245 that's good two or three it's three three four five right yes okay so we should anticipate seeing some additional revenues so based on this number it appears as if you're on a trajectory to come closer to the 2021 numbers, to the four and change, not the six that you shared.

- 1:26:57 Yes. Okay. All right. Point of information. I was going to allow a burning question. One second. Just trying to wrap this up. Okay. Senator Blayden, you have a burning question? I'll ask one. Yes. Director, you stated earlier that the board is reviewing the regulations that you submitted. So when were those regulations submitted to the board? I would have to look back on my email to see exactly when I submitted.
- 1:27:41 But I know we met last month, which is June month. And was legal counsel involved in the preparation and review of the draft regulations? Legal counsel was not. It was just the board members. Well, not all seven. I think it was five board members and myself. And were there anything in those regulations regarding taxis and all safaris, especially with a new act that was just implemented?
- 1:28:18 This was before the new act was implemented, so that would have to, but there is information in there pertaining to safaris. And did you have a quorum? If we had a quorum? Yes. If my recollection served me correctly, yes. But we did not get through it in its entirety. So you only met once when it came to those draft regulations? So far. Very well. Without further discussions.
- 1:28:48 Thank you so much, Madam Chair, for the time. Thank you, Senator Blyden. Senator Fonseca. Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. Ms. Clombs, one quick question about the taxi vans with the 27 passenger vans. Explain to me the process, how you're ensuring now that the road safety is in full compliance and that those vans are now safe, being the recent laws that have been acted upon. How are you enforcing and ensuring, rather, that those vans are safe to be operated on the road? So, we're not talking vans, we're talking about the open air vehicles, the safaris?
- 1:29:31 The safaris, yeah. Okay, so what happens here is they have a form that they would take to we have two certified welders on st. Thomas and they would go to the welder once you know they come to the taxicab Commission to express their intent To increase their capacity or to build a new one could be within the 20 or less and They will be given this form to take to the welder for to certify the work on that will be done on this truck once that is taking place they would return the form to the taxicab Commission we would then give them the okay to go ahead and build a truck once that truck is then built they would then bring the pictures and everything back to the vehicle with you know the vehicle of progress and the vehicle itself would come down and the uh taxi inspector would go ahead and you know approve it approve look look through uh the work that was done ensuring that you know okay the seats are this and no loose parts and stuff the basic things okay and then we would then give them the appropriate documentation to take to motor vehicle okay to register that vehicle thank you thank you madam chair i just want to be clear on that Thank you, Madam Chair.
- 1:31:06 Thank you, Senator Fonseca. Senator Pinovel-Francis, Jr. He's speaking, but he... We're unable to hear him. Mic check, one, two. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Director Gumbs, is the mold situation over at your building, has that been addressed? I am still displaced in my office. I'm sorry? And the water leak was addressed, yes, but there are still some little other things to take place before I can move back and put my desk back in position. Okay, and that's being handled by the by the building owner or is that something that is being borne by the the taxi cab?
- 1:32:01 The building owner. Okay do you have a status on when that will be addressed? No I do not but I will follow through with that. Okay so you're utilizing another room within the um building at this time or you have not been able to access the building as a result of not having your office no i utilize another desk within the office okay and the situation with your other employee that's been out for the last two weeks is that associated with mold as well i cannot say specifically i know i i was you know she just shared that it is a medical issue that she has all right and in your in regards to the digitalization and you spoke about with the \$400,000 is it your testimony that you had received bids on on those and that are costs and selected the the least bitter it was not necessarily the least bidder but it was the most knowledgeable bidder that it was selected on and and to the point to that point the other vendor have since written to the agency stating that they no longer they have closed the doors okay how long ago was that bid is it still current or you'll need to seek additional new bids to be able to accomplish the task because obviously cost has increased since then correct correct so when was when was this bid
- 1:33:53 received the bid was received August I think 2023 or there about and it was voted on by the board I think back in the latter part of October or early November of 23. Okay all right thank you obviously that's 11 months ago so I would imagine that um they'll they'll need to review that once again but I think before we go there have you had any discussion with with BIT or other entity that will be able to assist and support you being able to capture the information that you're seeking to capture? Yes I have been in communications with director ross and his team and he have uh put together a team to come down to the office and do the physical so that we also receive four donated computers from the bmv that they would come to put in place next week and and get us started with how they can help and what all they can do to bridge the gap in the meantime thank you senator francis jr i'm glad that you mentioned bit not bit dmb the bureau of motor vehicle because they have a system where they collect the information so you know it's time for these agencies to partner and collaborate on assisting you with getting that data dump completed. So we don't need to spend a half a

million dollars for that, because we have systems already that collect similar type of information, so it just requires some sort of an extension.

1:35:43 We do have the Deputy Commissioner or the Assistant Commissioner of the Department of Property and Procurement here. So we will, when we open the meeting, we're going to ask him about the situation. I think you rent from property and procurement, right? That's how, that's the space that you're housed in. So we'll get a better understanding from them what's going on with that. So you say you are not physically in your office. And my office space, I'm within TCC's office, but I'm sitting at another desk within the office.

1:36:15 So you are in the building. In the building. But not located in your office. That's correct. So what is in your office now? So my nothing right now, I mean, all the furniture and everything is still there, but because of a recent leak that was directly over the desk. Okay. How recent was that? About maybe four or five, five weeks, six. So you moved out five weeks ago. About that.

1:36:45 Oh, so you were not okay. So this, I thought this was something ongoing from the last time that's, that's how it sounded when you responded. Oh. That you never moved back into your office. So you were in your office, but there was an event. A recent leak. Mm-hmm. I see. Okay. All right. Senator DeGraff, and then it'll be Senator Capehart. Senator Capehart.

1:37:13 Thank you, Madam Chair. Okay. Okay, capital outlay is property and procurement. Your vacancies that you're requesting, the five positions are filled. You have them, your request is at 50% or 100%? Well, I think it would be best filled at 50%, granting our challenges right now, 50%. So that's what you have for your vacancies? I didn't stipulate that in my testimony.

1:37:45 Okay, so the money that you want for vacancy, \$350,000, \$235,000, \$58,000, that's calculated at what? Well, I did not include the French benefits or any of that sort. I just put the raw totals for the positions. Oh, okay, okay. So I guess, like I said, the information being sent, that would come. Now, you had where you have on the next page, page 11 of your testimony, we have the deposits for St. Croix, St. Thomas, St. John in regards to revenues collected. Where is that money deposited to? In the taxi fund account.

1:38:33 So it's in a taxi fund account that you have access to? I don't have access to uh um department of finance okay good and finally in on same page 11 you have you know other services and charges you have all other ten thousand five hundred dollars what is what does all other covers so all other covers are annual veterans medallion auction so what I did is I take um the minimum bid amount per island times it by two for each island and pretty much just you know uh do the percentage of 20 and it would bring it to roughly 19 000 a little less than twenty thousand dollars however looking at the past two years that we did not have a bids from each island I just take the lower number and include okay so the ten thousand five hundred are for to purchase the medallions to be auctioned so no by law for each medallion that is sold in each district the taxicab commission have to give the office of veteran affairs 20 percent okay okay so that that's a 20 percent you get to me okay all right thank you thank you madam chair thank you senator de graff senator capehart your burning question Thank you, Madam Chair. Ms. Gumbs, have you and the board members ever tried to identify

1:40:24 grant funding to assist with your digitizing needs? so I have attempted to and the the issue with that became one where it needed three different signatures in addition to my own and the timing to get it in on time submitted on time Wow because I I know there's availability of funding to assist you through the Department of Interior, the Office of Insular Affairs. They have a capital improvement grant for financial management practices and this would be perfect. The grant expires by you there's a deadline of September 13, 2024. You're asking close to \$500,000 and with all the concerns I hear today I asked some further questions about your internal processes you said you don't really follow PMP's processes I am not part of this committee but I can I could not support this because you cannot justify today sitting here before us a lot of the questions that we have because you have issues with the board you have issues with lack of staffing you have issues with many things environmental issues and I would say you need help.

1:42:02 And I think before you come to this body, I think you need to explore all your options as grant funding. Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Senator Capehart. Senator Joseph, you're recognized for your burning question. Thank you so kindly, Madam Chair. I do have one burning question, Ms. Gumbs. Does the commission have any outstanding litigations against it or judgment? Anybody suing you, the commission, and you have gotten an order or a judgment in the plaintiff's... There is one. There is one. Okay, so you have a judgment already or it's ongoing? It's ongoing. Okay. All right. Thank you so much.

1:43:01 All right, colleagues. We have exhausted our discussion. I don't think that we've exhausted our questions, but we have definitely exhausted our discussion today. There is, I'm not leaving the conversation feeling any better than the discussion that we had the last time, there is more information as it relates to the need, but I will say that we've been discussing this

vexing issue for a very long time. We're talking about additional resources, and should be told, we do have the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs where we have a able staff who can assist with this work and we need to be mindful about how we utilize our government resources in times like these, particularly since this particular commission, the taxicab commission's responsibility is responsible for generating their own revenues to cover their expenses and in fact the revelations that we continue to see is that it's not doing that and the question, the ask continues to be more and more.

1:44:40 So again, we need to, I don't know that this conversation is going to improve. We need to give serious consideration to moving the taxicab commission from placing it under the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs. They have the systems in place. They have the admin staff. They have all the additional staff. We only need to get additional enforcement in order to get this work done. And, you know, while there may be political energies around this, we have to do what's best for the people at the Virgin Islands at this point and do what's best as relates to our ability to expend and utilize our revenues, our ability to generate and utilize our revenues. So I am prepared to do what I have to do to address this situation. I'm not going to call away from it because we've been at this and we've heard it and we've heard it and we've heard it and you know if we If we don't act, then it says that we, too, have some level of culpability in this situation that's occurring at the Taxi Cab Commission. Ms. Gumbs, I'm going to give you 30 seconds to close. And we will, oh, before you close, let me just, there has been some through the chair requests. Give me one second. So through the chair, the question was asked for you to provide the number of leases, the number of taxi operators, the number of operators, the number of active medallions, the number of inactive medallions, the amount paid in board member stipends, and the amount owed to board members. the breakdown of the 345 in revenues that you've collected this fiscal

1:46:42 year by fee category. You said that when you presented the information for the positions, you only presented the raw personnel and the fringe was not considered. So we need to get the associated fringe benefits associated with those positions. And I asked you for the... But you said that you've already provided, so we're going to look for that one. So I'm going to pass on that one. So we will send you something in writing, but in the interim, this is the information that we need to assist us with making an informed decision. It's extremely difficult when you have a small organization like this and you're just not able to pull it together. Who's the chair of the board right now?

1:47:33 Well, the vice chair, Elizabeth Hanson-Watley, is acting in the interim. So we don't have a board chair. Correct. Okay. All right. Colleagues, we've exhausted our discussion on this taxicab commissioned budget hearing. So we are going to take a break so we can prepare ourselves for the two leases that's before us this afternoon. So the committee, did I, did I, did you give a 30 second wrap up? Go ahead. I'm sorry. You can, 30 seconds, my bad.

1:48:17 So I just want to say thank you for inviting me here today. And I wish to thank all the different agencies and staff who have and continue to work with us to try to get this commission back on track. I hope that at the end that this body would take into consideration and give us some funding so that we could continue to operate. Thank you everyone. Thank you, and enjoy the rest of your day.

1:48:52 The Committee on Budget Appropriations and Finance stands in recess for 15 minutes. I'll see you next time Thank you.
Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. I love you, I
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right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Let's go.

2:17:21 The committee is back on the record, Madam Clerk, can you please read the items in block two, into the record. Block two. leases.

2:17:59 Bill number 350284, an act approving the lease agreement between the government of the Virgin Islands, acting through its commission of the Department of Property and Procurement and Rural Enterprises, Inc., doing business as best car rental, Parcel number 294, Estate Content, Enide, Cruise Bay Quarter, St. John, Virgin Islands, for the continued operation of a car and Jeep rental business and for other related purposes. Invited testifier, Mr. Roosevelt David, President, Rural Enterprises Incorporated. Bill number 350294, an act approving the lease agreement between the government of the Virgin Islands and Banco Popular of Puerto Rico for a portion of lot number 48B, Noragada, King's Quarters in Thomas, Virgin Islands. Invited testifier, Ms. Oran C. Roebuck, senior vice president and district manager, Virgin Islands District. This concludes the reading of today's agenda, Madam Chair. Thank you, Madam Clerk. And this afternoon we will hear two leases, bill number 35.0284 and bill number 35.0294 as we've heard from the clerk. And we

do have the testifiers here ready to proceed. However, I'm going to ask who speaks to bill number 35.0284.

2:19:50 I do. You may proceed. Senator Francis Jr. A flashback. 5.0284, an act approving the lease agreement between the government of the Virgin Islands, acting through its commissioner of the Department of Property and Procurement, and Rural Enterprise Inc doing business as Best Car Rental Parcel Number 294 Estate, Kantan and Inai Cruise Bay Quarter St John Virgin Islands for the continued operation of a car and Jeep rental business and for other related purposes. This proposed measure is sent down by the Governor's Office Governor Albert Bryan Jr. The agreement is for a multiple year lease of 20 years with an option to renew for an additional two ten-year terms. You know former Senator Roosevelt C. David, St. C. David and his wife Elita have operated this business since the 1980s. As a small business owners they have certainly encountered their share of challenges all while providing an integral service and contributing to the territory's revenues base. This lease would allow for Royal Enterprise Inc. doing business as car best best car rental to continue its operation of a car and Jeep rental service. I'm also offering bill number 35.0294 a multi-year lease between the government of Horizons and Banco Popular de Puerto Rico. This proposed measure is being offered again by the request of Governor Albert Bryan Jr. This agreement is for a 10-year lease with the option to renew for two additional terms of five years each. This lease supports the

2:21:38 bank's operation of the ATM machines, thereby providing easy access to cash and banking services for local and visitors alike. I ask my colleagues support on these two measures, again adding to economic role and moving these measures forward. Thank you very much Madam Chair for the opportunity and time thank you senator francis jr we do have the uh assistant commissioner vincent richards of the department of property and procurement and we do have the two um representatives for the respective leases so i'm going to ask the uh testifiers to put their names and titles on the record with an other entity on the record and then we'll proceed we'll start with the assistant commissioner of the department of property and procurement and then to my right your left and then we'll move over to the other side uh mr richards good morning vincent richards assistant commissioner of the department of property and procurement i'm roosevelt david President of Rural Enterprises Inc. Tiffany M. Gumbs Vice President and Manager of Banca Popular Virgin Islands Region. All right and you are all prepared to testify on your respective lease requests correct? I am. Yes. Yes Madam Chair. Mr. Richards you will go first you may proceed with your testimony. Good Good morning, Chair Donna A. Fred Gregory, Vice-Chair Novelli Francis Jr., Committee Members, the Honourable Senators Blyden, Calliorn, DeGraff, Fonseca, James Sr., non-committee members, central and legislative staff, fellow testifiers, visitors present in the chambers and members of the viewing and listening audience, I am Vincent Richards, Assistant Commissioner of the Virgin Islands Department of Property and Procurement.

2:23:44 I'm here today on behalf of Commissioner Lisa M. Alejandro to testify and request support on the proposed lease agreements before this committee for consideration. The Department of Property and Procurement requests this committee's and ultimately the full Senate's approval of the lease agreements between the Government of the Virgin Islands and Rural Enterprises Incorporated, doing business as Best Car Rentals and Banco Popular de Puerto Rico. lease agreements all require legislative approval in accordance with 31 Virgin Islands Code subsection 205. Their terms all commence on the first day of the month following the approval of the governor and the legislature of the Virgin Islands. The rents payable under these leases shall all respectively after respective individual grace periods be adjusted annually including any renewal term in accordance with the consumer price index increase established by the US Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics. The following lease agreements require a minimum of one million dollars limited general liability insurance. As the premises owner the Department of Property and procurement will be required to execute all permits and licenses required for the premises. These potential lessees have provided the required documentation to support the processing of their respective lease agreements with the government of the Virgin Islands, included but not limited to their respective business licenses and certificate of good standings. The lease agreement between Banco Popular and the government of the Virgin Islands, acting through the Department of Property and Procurement, is for a portion of lot number 48B, Noragata, King's Quarters, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, consisting of approximately 85 square feet of interior space known as suite number 102A in a one-story masonry building consisting of 1,250 square feet of improved

2:26:02 property. The property will be used to operate and maintain and service a banking automatic teller machine and for other related purposes. The term of this agreement is for 10 years and the lease agreement provides for two optional five-year renewals. The annual rent for the above reference parcels will be \$18,000 annually payable in equal monthly installments of \$1,500 during the term of the lease agreement. This specific lease agreement is a the final component of a public-private partnership project. By collaborating with multiple public and this private sector partner, this historic building, and this historic and once derelict building was renovated, upgraded, and repurposed into a now landmark in the downtown Charlotte, Amalia.

- 2:26:56 We have removed asbestos from the building, made it ADA compliant and accessible, modernized the HVAC system, and this private partner, specifically Banco Popular, installed and maintained an emergency generator at the building. The building now hosts a public restroom, which was a dire public need previously talked about for decades, a visitor center staffed by the Department of Tourism, an office space for the Virgin Islands Police Department's downtown bicycle unit, and now lastly a much-needed and conveniently located ATM machine. The lease agreement between rural enterprises and the government of the Virgin Islands acting through the Department of Property and Procurement is for parcel number 294 estate content and an N9 cruise bay quarter St. John Virgin Islands consisting of approximately four thousand twenty four thousand eight hundred twenty square feet or point zero one one u.s. acres of semi improved land the property will be used to operate a car rental business and for other related purposes the term of the term of this agreement is for 20 years and the lease agreement provides two ten-year renewal option period the annual rent for the subject property is \$14,400 per year, payable in installments of \$1,200 monthly.
- 2:28:28 The proposed lease agreements, these proposed lease agreements will assist these businesses as they plan for expansion and improve operations in the St. Thomas, St. John district. These lease agreements will also contribute to the ongoing growth of the U.S. Virgin Islands and the long-term stability and expansion of the economy. These properties will be returned to the government in the end of their respective lease terms in much improved condition. The Department of Property and Procurement and its commissioner, Alejandro, Lisa Alejandro, pardon me, are the custodians of all government-owned properties. We are therefore committed to establishing mutually beneficial partnerships and agreements with tenants and developers that unlock value and GVI-owned properties. The department therefore respectfully requests that the Committee on Budget, Appropriation, and Finance vote in favor of these lease agreements. This concludes my testimony. I'm prepared to answer any question the committee may have on the reference lease agreements. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.
- 2:29:37 Thank you, Mr. Richards. will now hear from Mr. Roosevelt David. Actually, which one is first on the agenda? Mr. Roosevelt David, you may proceed. Good day, Madam Chairperson of the Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance, the Honourable Donna A. Fred Gregory, and all other distinguished senators present or not. My name is Roosevelt St. Clair David, president of Royal Enterprises, Inc., doing business as Best Car Rental on St. John, and my wife, Leota Aylita David, is the vice president. Aylita regrets that she is unable to be in attendance at this meeting due to illness. I am here to present testimony on the renewal of a lease on 294 Annihyde Contant, St. John, consisting of 4,820 square feet of government property where we have been located for a little over 30 years.
- 2:30:51 I hereby submit historical information about the family's pursuits regarding this venture so you may get an understanding as to how we got here during the early 1980s my wife and i invested in this little business with the goal to sustain our family create jobs and generate revenues from which government continues to benefit as we progressed we incorporated the business in 1985. For unknown reasons, however, at the time, our nightmares started to the point that my wife suggested that we quit and get out of this business. And my response was an adamant no way. Everywhere that we were able to secure parking spaces, we were soon to be told you have 30 days to vacate because government was going to do something us this or that on that property but to this day nothing materialized frustration drove me to reach out to then senator ivor street diron who graciously traveled to st john to investigate the matter upon his return he informed me that it was personal and that I should talk to the other senators. I reached out to all 15 and gave them the facts. Mr. Larry Sibley, who was the Deputy Commissioner of Property and Procurement at that time, called me because he knew
- 2:32:40 what was happening and he said there is a small lot on St. John which the government has no plan to use for. If you are interested, I would prepare a lease for you and I will urge the commissioner, then Delmar Hodge, to sign off. They understood our plight and they were very sensitive. They made it happen. However, Larry Sibley informed me that the government lacked the resources to survey the property, grade it, remove the boulders, and clean it up. I paid for all of it. No reimbursement whatsoever, and I did not ask for it either. Astonishingly, as the lease was going through the process, some white folks on St. John orchestrated a plot to derail the measure. All kinds of letters and petitions were formulated with all kinds of fabrications. The 19th legislature would have none of it because they were fully briefed about the plot. The members of that body rejected their mischief and resoundingly and decisively voted in the affirmative when the measure reached governor Alex Farrelly's desk not only did he sign the measure but he personally called me and told me that he had signed the lease without hesitation and that a copy was on its way to the bank for me at the time I worked at the bank he said Roosevelt is what he used to call me. I want to send a message that my people must prosper to. Let me repeat what the governor then said, Roosevelt. I want to send a message that my people must
- 2:34:46 prosper to. I do not know about the prosperity, but I experienced hard work and lots of trials and tribulations, and challenges. But as a result of these leaders, we are operating at 294-INI-HEAD-Content for over three decades. Currently, the Commissioner of Property and Procurement, Lisa Alejandro, and Assistant Commissioner Vince Richards have been

working very cooperatively with us, and we want to thank them publicly. Madam Chair, I ask for your support and the support of the other senators on this measure, and I'm very anxious to answer any questions.

- 2 : 35 : 38 I thank you. Thank you, Mr. David, for your passionate testimony. Thank you. We'll now hear from Ms. Tiffany Gumbs of Banco Popula. You may proceed, Ms. Gumbs. Good morning, Senator Donna Fred Gregory, chairperson of the Committee on Budget Appropriations and Finance of the 35th Legislature of the U.S. Virgin Islands and all other senators present. My name is Tiffany M. Gumbs. I am the vice president and manager of region operations for Banco Popula in the Virgin Islands region. I appear before you today to seek your ratification and the multi-year lease agreement between the government of the Virgin Islands and Banco Popular de Puerto Rico to lease a portion of lot number 48B, Noragata, King's Quarter, St. Thomas, consisting of 85 square feet of interior space known as number 102A suite.
- 2 : 36 : 37 Popular Inc. is the leading financial institution in Puerto Rico by assets and deposits and ranks among the most, the top 50 U.S. banks holding companies by assets. Founded in 1893, Banco Popular de Puerto Rico, the principal subsidiary of Popular Inc. provides retail, mortgage, commercial banking services in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Collectively, Popular operates a network of over 220 branches, 760 ATMs, and employs over 8,500 individuals within the communities we serve.
- 2 : 37 : 20 Banco Popular de Puerto Rico entered the Virgin Islands in 1981 with the acquisition of the Royal Bank of Canada and began operations with one branch in Christiansted St. Croix. Later, by acquiring Citibank and Core State First Pennsylvania Bank, the bank solidified its business in both the U.S. and British Virgin Islands. Today, Bank of Popular Virgin Islands region includes nine retail branches, three commercial banking centers, and three mortgage loan centers, as well as 21 ATMs operating in St. Croix, St. Thomas, St. John, Tortola, and Virgin Gorda. The Virgin Islands region employs over 170 individuals, maintains an average deposits of approximately two billion and a loan portfolio of over 600 million and also serves over 70,000 clients. Bank of Popular remains committed to its investment in the Virgin Islands. We continue to serve our community with the focus on four strategic pillars sustainable and profitable growth creating growth opportunities for both the bank and our clients simplicity improving our operational efficiencies customer focus improving the service delivery to our clients utilizing innovation and technology and also fit for the future we aim to strengthen our talent base and effectively manage risk to ensure longevity within the market popular takes great strides to ensure that our products are suitable and responsive to the evolving financial needs of the community as a priority over the past four years the bank has implemented key initiatives to respond to the evolving needs of our customer
- 2 : 39 : 14 base by incorporating more digital channels to meet your financial needs One key initiative was a merger of the main office and the Hibiscus Alley branch in Charlotte Amali which was conducted in 2023. Over the last 10 years customer foot traffic at the Hibiscus Alley branch has steadily declined by more than 40 percent but the use of the ATM remains significantly high. It was clear that the client base within the downtown Charlotte Amali zone gave priority to the digital options available. From 2021, over 67% of deposits in the Virgin Islands are captured through digital channels and over 54% of our clients actively use our digital app MeBanco. Given this shift in customer channel usage, Banco Popular has closed the Hibiscus Alley branch and entered an agreement with the Virgin Islands government to install an ATM at number 48B Noragata, Kingswater, St. Thomas, Suite 1028. The ATM at 48B Noragata supplements the services offered at the main office branch. This ATM provides an alternate delivery channel for cash dispensing, account inquiry, and deposit services. Since its installation, the Noragata ATM has processed over 57,000 transactions, and also an increase in usage of the easy deposit feature has demonstrated by more than 200% since the move from our Hibiscus Alley. The Noragata ATM also supplements and enhances the service offerings to our visitors at the Tourism Department's Visitor Center. I hope this information have presented today assures this body that Banco Popular continues to respond effectively
- 2 : 41 : 18 to the evolving financial needs of the Virgin Islands community and this lease with the Virgin Islands government is a good partnership to advance economic activity. On behalf of Popular, I thank you for consideration of this lease agreement and I remain available to answer any questions. Thank you. Thank you for your testimony, Ms. Gumbs. Colleagues, we're going to go to a four-minute round as we query the two leases that's before us and we're going to start with Senator Marvin Blyden. Senator Blyden, you may proceed with your four minutes. Thank you so much Madam Chair, good afternoon. Again to my colleagues, good afternoon, former Senator David. Good afternoon. Assistant Commissioner Richards and Ms. Gumbs.
- 2 : 42 : 12 Good afternoon, Senator. Thank you so much for your testimonies. These two leases are a no-brainer in respect to what it does in relation to, number one, commerce, economic development, and jobs. I must say, though, that let me start with For you, Senator David, it's a good thing that the 19 legislature understood the importance of investing in its own people

despite the many, many challenges that you had. And thank God that you and your wife persevered three decades of a long time to be in business. absolutely and i do wish you much success moving forward and continued continued blessings from this side in respect to banco popular i thank you to puerto rico ms gums um you seem to be a young person to be operations manager for this region I really I say I'm kudos and congratulations thank you senator I was I was kind of surprised I like wow that's very good but what also surprised me though it the number of individuals that visits the ATM in such a short span of time. Location matters. Location is very important. And I miss, I miss Hibiscus Alley, though. I ain't gonna lie to you. I miss it desperately. You know, there were never much of a line. The service was excellent. The customer service was excellent. I must say that. So I must make up to those individuals. Did it affect any employees in terms of losing their jobs? Tiffany Gums, Banco Popular, thank you for that question, Senator. No, we did not have any, our employees that were at the

2:44:30 Hibiscus Alley were transferred to other areas so there was no loss of jobs. Okay I'm happy to hear that and also in respect to what's going on in a reconstruction phase are you guys doing um construction loans do you know i need to ask that question it's important yes yes senator tiffany gums yes we are doing construction loans and lending that's good to know i'm glad you put it on the record also and let me go back to um senator david because i know i need to hear a little bit from you in respect to the pushback you had at the time what what did you do to really um persevere so you can speak to others who go through the same thing every time we have a situation over there I fought back hard and I planned to move forward and I want to encourage entrepreneurs to be strong in their conviction work hard and never give up it's not gonna be a smooth day every day but at the end it's beneficial to the business owner and the community yeah thank you for the words of encouragement and advice again I don't have much to say because like I say I do support both this is and thank you so much madam chair for the time thank you for responses thank you senator Fonseca you recognize for your four minutes yes thank you good afternoon Madam Chair. A special welcome to Senator Roosevelt, David, Tiffany Gumbs, Blessings, and of course Vincent from Property and Procurement. I am in support of both of these leases. um i wanted to first discuss uh the 294 estate content in n9 cruise bay you know that's a worthy cause best car rental continues to employ locals it's owned by locals and we always have to

2:46:45 support that that's an easy one um you know um vincent gums you know i got a single him out right i think vincent gums is doing an awesome job in property and procurement the amount of revenues you are bringing in with these richards i'm sorry richards vincent um i got some numbers in my mind here a little thing in advance you know the amount of revenues with these leases you bringing in right it's awesome you know and i want to highlight this out right because people of the virgin islands take a look at this right this bank of popular lease is 85 square foot you know the billing code in the virgin islands your bedroom need to be a hundred square foot so this space is less than your bedroom and we get in fifteen hundred dollars for this popa So imagine if this was a 1,000-square-foot house, a normal house.

2:47:47 The rent would be \$17,647. See money there, Popa. So this is what is happening with the Virgin Islands. You see, where I keep telling the people of the Virgin Islands, things are getting better. Can you imagine a lease? This is what we're voting on, a lease to Banco Popular for 85 square foot. this is less than your bedroom you can't build a bedroom at 85 square foot the minimum is a hundred mr vincent richards here is going to get us 1500 a month congratulations madam chair i don't have any further um questions but i want to do what make one note yes there's been over 57 000 transactions process this is a nice painted banco popular little stop there right there um by you know vendors plaza right down here going into um main street when you come after what so this is progress for the virgin islands as you can see things are getting better thank you Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair. Senator Fonseca, why you open Pandora's Backside with me this afternoon?

2:49:05 So of course, I just have one pet peeve. Because even my good colleague, Senator Fonseca, is saying that this building, this space is a Banco Popular space. space is our welcome center for our tourists. It's downtown, it has bathrooms, and I'm going to say to Mr. Richards again, do we need to do a little appropriation so you can pop a bigger sign? Oh no, you did say it's the... Let me... Tell us what the issue is with the sign. I don't understand how Banco Papala... You know, sometimes you just gotta do and just get a little hit okay see bank about what they say what what issues are those saying don't say smile vincent richard's department of property and procurement senator you're going to the project process so i'm sure when the department of tourism comes down here you could discuss with them about um putting a sign on the building and property and become will definitely support a larger sign for the department of tourism and for the virgin islands police department to put a larger sign on the building so other than that i'd just like to say that this week or last week when all the power was going off and going on that building stayed energized because of banco popular and because of the the generator that they placed on the top of that building that at a cost of i'm sure about twenty thousand dollars so these are the kind of partnerships that we want to enter into excellent okay so public we're going to work on the sign um once once somebody puts in for their sign and pays for it. We're going to sign off for it and make sure we install a larger sign for the government agencies on that building. Excellent public-private partnership, but I have...

- 2:50:54 We're very close to finishing a deal to renovate and rebuild the building that sits right next to it, the old legislature, old district court building. We're very, very close within striking distance to get that building finally renovated, completely renovated and and rebuilt and repurposed and and and you know i'm not looking at we can't wait to hear what it's going to be used for make sure it includes something for the people absolutely but um i thought that the issue with the same was the historic preservation but senator honestly there is a regulation for the sign i mean um i i do have some laundry that i could wash about the sign my issue my concerns about the signage but i'd rather not do it in public but i i would say you know if given the funds to sign for us man don't worry about that they could pay for the sign right miss gums yeah we need a bigger sign yeah because i'm i'm i i joke and banter about it but it's i'm very serious about it. The sign is, like I said before, I said it on the record before, a gentleman tell me to meet him in town and he said meet him by the Banco Papella building and I am having this. He said yeah man the blue building on the corner and I'm like Banco Papella building on the corner? I thought they moved. So I realized that it's our visitor center. So we need to make the sign a little bigger. So a tourists could know right up front that this is the visitor center in the town of Charles Hamali when they come in. I'm gonna send the Department of Tourism, my friends Ms. Alany Henneman, I'm gonna
- 2:52:46 send her an email. I'll copy you on it about the sign for for the building. I don't email them today because they come before us but I didn't ask them because when you spoke to me you had me a little confused. I thought you were you were the one that put up the sign. I ain't got no money. who pulled the same which sign are we talking about the sign the little the little six inch by six in the department of tourism did it's not six by six it's two it's actually two feet by two feet two feet by two feet yes the code limits it to four feet four square feet okay so we're gonna we don't we don't get our one result one way or the other uh senator Javon James, senior you recognize for your four minutes. Greetings to the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands, I stand in full support of these two leases before us, I've had an opportunity to read the supporting documents that came down to the legislature, I only have one question, and my question to both who are seeking approval for lease agreements is have you had a chance to thoroughly do an assessment to make sure that you have adequate insurance to be able to carry out your duties and to make sure that till tomorrow we have a hurricane you are in a green it's all right it's in my Roosevelt David role enterprises it's It's in my best interest to do that, so yes.
- 2:54:23 Next, Banco Popular. Thank you, Senator Tiffany Gumbs, Banco Popular. Yes, we have ensured that we carry out the necessary insurance criteria. That's all I have. I hope and pray we don't have any major activity this hurricane season and may God continue to bless the Virgin Islands. Thank you. Thank you, Senator James, Senator DeGraff, you're recognized for your four minutes.
- 2:54:59 Thank you, Madam Chair. Good afternoon colleagues, good afternoon testifiers, all of you listening and present. You know, there's a fuss in a while I hear the Honorable Senator David come down and ain't talking a lot, and you're representing yourself. I support your business 100%. Okay, thanks. Okay, so normally you come and represent other people, and we can't stop your time, but for your own. But we got you on this. Now, for Ms. Gumbs, it's your first time. I thought I had 12 questions for you, but we'll start off. You brought some support with you in the back. Who's the young lady you brought, and, you know, she needed to be up front with you. I just want to find out.
- 2:55:42 Thank you, Senator. The young lady is just visiting, and no, she does not need to sit apart. Okay, okay, okay. Just making sure. You know, to ease, you'll put you at ease. But you at the table there with two gentlemen who are, you know, they're the top of the game. Now, Honorable Senator David, your business has been there on St. John for how long? We've been in business for about 40 years, but we're at the spot now for a little over 30 years. okay okay and and you're looking for 20 year to 10 year extension yes is that satisfactory to you for now yes we've settled for that okay good good good i want to make sure now uh for ms gums yours is uh five years or is it what what are you asking for in terms of your extension 10 years and two five-year extension yes senator tiffany gums we're asking for 10 years and the open ability to extend two more terms five years each and that's satisfactory to you also yes at this time it is yes okay good and you know like I say in the nighttime the bright light there totally illuminates the whole corner so that that's a plus I'm very happy for that you know before close out I just want to know for both of you which are you know my colleague mentioned about deputy commissioner Richard's in terms of getting things moving he's been here before as many times we as best we just find an extra chair for him and leave him here but no how has the experience been first honorable and then I close over miss Gumbs experience been working with Department of Procurement and Deputy Richard's getting this process done Roosevelt David role enterprises I have
- 2:57:35 no problem whatsoever when I call this gentleman Vince Richards he responds and he knows his work he knows his job and he does it very efficiently good like to hear that miss gums Tiffany gums mr. Richards has been very open he's been amenable he has been responsive and we have not had any challenges with the process it was outlined what needed to be done one minute we complied okay good Good. And again, Ms. Gomes, your title is?

- 2:58:08 My title is Vice President and Manager for Region Operations, Banco Popular, the Virgin Islands region. Well, I'm very happy to say that, you know, a young person, local, top of the game. I'm really happy to see that, man. And in closing, the Banco Popular area that you chose, maybe Maybe you don't have any other spots you're looking at, but is Bangor popular looking at any other places, maybe the downtown area or around that area, to put any more of those ATM machines?
- 2:58:44 Thank you, Senator. We have not begun looking primarily at a specific area. It's based on the uses of the machine that we see. We will analyze that over time, and we will also consider the needs that's changing in the community to determine if we're going to expand a little further in terms of the downtown area. Okay, great. Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Senator De Graff. I think that's it for now. Before we go to the sponsor, so just to make sure that we're all on the same page, all of the requisite documentation was provided for boat leases, is inclusive of the liability insurance, and the both entities are required to keep in force a policy on property damage.
- 2:59:45 So that is one of the requirements of the lease. I just have a quick question for Mr. David, because this is an economic development, well Well, I'm not going to say economic development because this is a renewal, but this business is on St. John, and St. John is very important to our tourism industry, and you provide lease vehicles to many of the tourists that pass through, that are GEM, correct? Rental, yes. So how many jobs do you provide?
- 3:00:31 Over the years, dozens, dozens of jobs. Dozens of jobs. And that's important, dozens of jobs because as we work on these leases, it's important for folks to understand that once we say yes to these leases, it keeps folks employed in the territory. don't really have any questions for either yourself or Banco Popular other than the creation of jobs. I guess I have one more question. So you say one is for another 30 years? Maybe 40. Another 40. Okay. When I was here, you know, I pushed for Bank of Popular to get a hundred years and they did get that.
- 3:01:18 Okay so I'm just saying you're doing another farty so just give me the portion okay just give me the portion but I don't see any reason why we would not support these two measures now we are able to just walk across the street and go to the money machine I just want to say it bigger, I just want to say it bigger, but I too want to lend my voice to congratulating you, former Senator David, on the fact that while the territory has gone through troubling times economically, we've gone through COVID, we've experienced several hurricanes in the, what is it, 30 years?
- 3:02:04 In the 30 years that you've been in existence, you're still, your business is still up and running and you ought to be commended for that because you know it's not easy to run a business and especially in an economy like the economy that we have so I want to commend you for staying staying in the paint and ensuring that you contribute lots of challenges yes you contribute to the economic prosperity of the Virgin Islands so I will continue to pay your taxes, so that's an important part of what we do, as you know, as we work on our budget. So you're helping us, our tax revenues as we build our budgets to provide services to the people in the territory, likewise yourself for the Banco Papala.
- 3:02:52 So I'm going to turn this over to the sponsor of the legislation, Senator Munovali Frazis, Jr., you're recognized for your four minutes. Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to my colleagues for their support of this two measures before us. And I also want to thank Honorable Senator David as well as Ms. Gumbs for their testimony on these measures and being able to responsibly answer the questions that have been posed against them today in regards to this. course the car rental provide for employment they provide for taxes and fees that goes into the coffers of governmental version it provides for tourism and business access as well as customer service you know so I want to thank them for that certainly the ATM provides you know service accessibility cash availability and right next to the vendors plaza so I think is critically position and not to mention that we have used it ourselves at the legislature when we get knocked up for donations and contributions we kind of run over there and be able to support and assist some of our constituents in their requests for you know various financial support in any way shape or form. So I think this is a win-win and certainly I too want to join my voice and congratulate Ms. Gums I believe that Ms. Robux sent an excellent representative to defend the least before us and I want to you know implore her to continue to do what she's doing there and continue to rise in the ladder that she's been doing there. Mr. David any words of wisdom? You the man with lyrics you know certainly in terms of our current and St. John how's business? Business
- 3:04:43 good? Well we had a good good season but now it's in the slow period and so you just got to um work with the tide work with the tide what is the creativity that that happens um when you do have that slow period of course um i guess let's give you opportunity to maintain your vehicles and do different things but any creativity how you utilize your um your rental vehicles during the slow period well i'm glad you asked that question because everything can't remain the same you've got to make adjustments accordingly and what we do our website we adjust it and then we come up with a strategy i don't want my competitors to know exactly what i'm doing but we reach out to many areas many areas and sit and chat with them and we do certain things and offer certain incentives and they will come they will come all right thank you thank you for I spent some time on St. John recently and I'll tell you that the island was tipping over in terms of tourists that were there and certainly a very good commentary and people enjoying themselves. Mr. Richards, thank Assistant

Commissioner Richards, thank you again for bringing these two leases together and working with these leasees to get this getting it to this point.

- 3:06:04 You have been doing a good job I must say and we continue to thank you for your service there and implore you to continue to make sure that we're you know providing these lease to entities that's requesting them because it bones well where we're putting as you have mentioned in your testimony put these properties to good use you know rather than having them derelict or just out there doing nothing so continue the good job that you're doing in that area. Madam Chair I I have nothing further to add to this discussion here today. I believe that my colleagues have already asked the right questions and we're ready to vote.
- 3:06:44 Do I have motion? Motion Madam Chair. You may proceed. Thank you very much Madam Chair and colleagues. I offer a bill number 35.0284 an act approving the lease agreement. I motion that the bill number 35.0284 an act approving the lease agreement between the government of the Virgin Islands acting through his commissioner of Department of Property and Procurement and Rural Enterprise Inc doing business as best car rental. Parcel number 294 Estate Canton and Inai Cruise Bay Quarter St John Virgin Islands for continued operation of a car and Jeep rental business and for other related purposes be approved by the Committee of the Rules of Correction Committee of Budget Appropriations and Finance and Center the Rules and Judiciary Committee for Better Betten ISO move.
- 3:07:43 Thank You Senator Francis Jr. Bill number 35.0284 has been properly moved by Senator Noveli Francis Jr. seconded by Senator Fronseca Senator Blyden. Senator DeGraff. Hearing no objections. Rule call please. Senator Marvin Blyden. Senator Blyden, yeah. Senator Samuel Carrion. Senator Samuel Carrion absent. Senator Dwayne DeGraff. Senator DeGraff, yes. Senator Ray Fonseca. Yes. Senator Fonseca, yes. Senator Novelli Francis, Jr.? Yeah.
- 3:08:26 Senator Francis, Jr., yeah. Senator Donna A. Fred Gregory? Yes. Senator Fred Gregory, yes. Senator Javani James, Sr.? Yes. Senator James, Sr., yes. Madam Chair, six yays and one absent. Thank you, Madam Clerk. Bill number 35.0284, an act approving the lease agreement between the government of the Virgin Islands, acting through its commissioner of the Department of Property and Procurement and Rural Enterprises, Inc., doing business as best car rental. Parcel number 294, Estate Contant, and Innerhine Cruise Bay Quarter, St. John, Virgin Islands, for the continued operation of a car and jeep rental business and for other related purposes have been favorably voted upon in this committee and will be sent to the Rules and Judiciary Committee for further consideration and action.
- 3:09:26 Do I hear a motion? Motion. You may proceed. Thank you very much, Madam Chair, Madam Chair and colleagues. I move that Bill No. 35.0294, a multi-year lease between the Government of the Virgin Islands and Banco Popular de Puerto Rico, be approved by the committee members of the Committee of Budget, Appropriations, and Finance, and sent forward to the Rules and Judiciary Committee for further vetting. I so move.
- 3:09:54 Second. Second. Bill No. 35.0294 has been properly moved by Senator Novali Francis Jr., seconded by Senator Ray Fonseca, Senator Dwayne M. DeGraff, Senator Marvin E. Blyden, hearing no objections, rule call please. Senator Marvin Blyden? Yeah. Senator Blyden, yeah. Senator Samuel Carrion? Senator Carrion absent. Senator Dwayne M. DeGraff? Yes. Senator DeGraff, yeah. Senator Ray Fonseca? Yeah. Senator Fonseca, yeah. Senator Novelli Francis, Jr.?
- 3:10:31 Yeah. Senator Francis Jr., yes. Senator Danae, Fred Gregory? Yes. Senator Fred Gregory, yes. Senator Javani James Sr.? Yes. Senator James Sr., yes. Madam Chair, six years, one absent. Thank you, Madam Clerk. Bill number 35-0294, an act approving the lease agreement between the government of the Virgin Islands and Banco Popular de Puerto Rico for a portion of lot number 48B, Noragata, King's Quarter, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands has been properly moved and has been voted favorably upon on this committee and be sent to the Rules and Judiciary Committee for further consideration and action.
- 3:11:21 Thank you for spending a portion of your day with us. We have exhausted the matters of the Rules and Judiciary Committee of the Budget and Appropriations Committee for today. I too want to lend my voice to congratulating Ms. Gumbs on the work that she does for Banco Papalar. The one thing that you guys did not say is, she's a girl. Yeah.
- 3:11:51 I expected that. Congratulations to you for all the work that you do. And of course, please give my regards to your other vice-president, Ms. Oran Roebuck-Bori. Senior Vice President. Senior Vice President. That's right. Senior Vice President. Thank you, Madam Chairperson. It was an honor to be here today. All right. And we're going to allow each of you a 30-second close. We're going to start with Mr. Richards and then we'll proceed with Mr. Former Senator David and then yourself, Ms. Gumbs.
- 3:12:22 Madam Chair, I'd just like to say thank you. I'll be remiss if I don't mention the names of William Harris, Ray Clark, Christina Perez, Arlette Hodge, Ms. Ciela Morton, Ms. Jamila Doolam Singh, and I know I'm missing one somewhere, and the entire staff, my commissioner, and the entire staff of the property and procurement and the property division that supports me and supports what we do. We try to hit 100% and knock the ball out of the park all the time. We don't get it

right all the time, but we do try to get it right and we do try to come every day and make positive impact on people's lives and get our job done at the Department of Property and Becurement.

- 3:13:09 So Senator Fonseca, thank you for the accolades. I appreciate it, but it's a team effort. It's not done by one person. So thank you very much. Okay, I appreciate it. Good afternoon Madam Chair. I want to thank you and the rest of the committee members for your diligence and having the understanding of what drives the economy. As a trained banker, I came from an institution that recognizes that the economy moves by economic activity. And I'd like to encourage all of our senators and others in the community to develop programs that could incentivize young people, more young people, to get into business and use your power and your authority to help them to move forward, not to depress them.
- 3:14:09 Because we have enough stress in this community already. So I want to commend you for the work that you do, and I just want us to get together to help younger people to move forward in a process similar to this. I thank you. Thank you. Ms. Gumbs? Ms. Thank you. I'd like to thank Commissioner Lisa Alejandro of Property and Procurement, Assistant Commissioner Vincent Richards for spearheading this initiative of Banco Popular being able to place an ATM in the downtown to support our community. And I would like to thank you, Madam Chair, and the remaining senators for supporting the initiative. We are thankful and we welcome the opportunity to serve the people throughout the community as much as possible. Thank you.
- 3:14:56 Thank you. And I guess it's important for me to also commend Mr. Richards for actually working with Banco Papalata to ensure that we do have that ATM machine in the downtown area. So, Mr. Richards, thank you for all that you do as well. We know that at times it's very difficult, and we do give you, we'll rough you up a little bit. But one thing we do is stand your ground, so, stand your ground, yes, yes, you're right. Iron sharpens iron, absolutely. So today is an early day for us, and we're going to take advantage of that.
- 3:15:37 The Committee of Budget Appropriations and Finance meeting of Friday, July 11th is hereby adjourned. We'll be right back.

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.

- 15x **Senator Ray Fonseca**
heard in this transcript as: Fonseca, Fronseca
- 12x **Senator Dwayne DeGraff**
heard in this transcript as: De Graff, DeGraff, Dwayne M. DeGraff
- 12x **Senator Marvin Blyden**
heard in this transcript as: Blayden, Blyden, Marvin E. Blyden
- 10x **Senator Novelle Francis**
heard in this transcript as: Francis Jr, Francis Jr., Noel Francis Jr, Novali Francis Jr, Noveli Francis Jr, Novelli Francis Jr.
- 5x **Senator Marise C. James**
the surname alone also matches: Javan James; Giovanni James Sr
heard in this transcript as: James, James Sr, James Sr., Maurice James
- 5x **Senator Samuel Carrion**
heard in this transcript as: Carrion
- 4x **Senator Diane T. Capeheart**
heard in this transcript as: Capehart
- 4x **Senator Javan James**
heard in this transcript as: Javani James Sr, Javani James Sr., Javon James
- 3x **Governor Albert Bryan Jr**
- 3x **Senator Carla Joseph**
the surname alone also matches: Clifford Joseph; Karla J. Joseph
heard in this transcript as: Joseph
- 3x **Senator Fred Gregory**
the surname alone also matches: Donna A. Frett-Gregory; Donna Frett-Gregory

- 3x **Commissioner Lisa M. Alejandro**
heard in this transcript as: Lisa Alejandro
- 3x **Senator Milton E. Potter**
heard in this transcript as: Potter
- 2x **Senator Donna A. Frett-Gregory**
heard in this transcript as: Donna A. Fred Gregory, Donna Fred Gregory
- 1x **Senator Donna Frett-Gregory**
heard in this transcript as: Donna A. Frett-Gregory

Bills and acts referred to

Matched by number against our own acts corpus. The number is what the recognition heard, so it may be wrong; where it resolved, the title is the one the Legislature gave the act.

Act 8845 Act 8845 · An Act granting a zoning use variance for Lot No. 3 Second Street, Subdivision of Estate Thomas, Kings Quarter, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, to allow for a restaurant and a fruit bar =e

Referred to but not found in our acts corpus: Bill 35-0230, Bill 35-0284, Bill 35-0294