



GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS  
OF THE  
UNITED STATES

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**VIRGIN ISLANDS TAXICAB COMMISSION**

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**TESTIMONY OF  
VERNICE M. GUMBS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
VIRGIN ISLANDS TAXICAB COMMISSION**

**COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY, JUSTICE, AND PUBLIC SAFETY  
February 13, 2024**

Honorable Kenneth L. Gittens, Chairperson of the Committee on Homeland Security, Justice & Public Safety, members, and non-members of the Committee on Homeland Security, Justice & Public Safety, thank you for inviting me to speak before your committee. My name is Vernice M. Gumbs, Executive Director of the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission. Today I will provide an update on the Commission's recruitment efforts, certification and recertification procedures, enforcement strategies, execution of penalties, citation records, and current initiative(s).

**RECRUITMENT**

Recruiting and staffing shortfalls continue to plague law enforcement agencies throughout the territory. Challenges include but are not limited to an increase rate of retirements, homeland security obligations, and higher wages. The general view among enforcement leaders is that recruitment has not kept pace with the changes. The goal in the recruitment of peace officers is, and always has been, to hire not merely enough

people but the right people. The Commission's recruitment efforts include going beyond racial, ethnic, and national diversity. We are seeking employees who are proficient with computer skills in addition to knowledge in all areas of law enforcement. A growing number of civil and criminal cases rely at least in part on digital evidence, email messages, internet browsing records, etc. who can conduct statistical analysis, be able to deliver presentations during town halls, community meetings, and interact professionally with our industry operators.

#### **CERTIFICATION AND RE-CERTIFICATION PROCEDURES:**

All the Commissions' Taxi Inspectors/Enforcement Officers are required to attend, participate, adhere to, and successfully pass the Peace Officer Standard & Training classes, commonly known as POST, which was established under 23 VIC Section 1201 to meet the standards of training for all peace officers under 5 VIC Section 3561 and maintain status as a peace officer for executing arrest warrants and making arrests under this subchapter.

The purpose and mission of POST is to promote and ensure peace officers throughout the territory receive professional law enforcement training while protecting the safety and welfare of its citizens and visitors alike. Currently, TCC has two-full time Taxi Inspectors/Enforcement Officers that have received their certification through POST and who continues to receive their recertification annually through POST.

#### **ENFORCEMENT STRATEGIES**

The Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission (VITCC) regulates automobiles for hire such as taxicabs and open-air vehicles commonly known as 'safaris' to ensure compliance with standards governing cleanliness, vehicle maintenance, and appropriate licensing

and documentation. The Commission employs Inspectors/Enforcement Officers that are required to enforce the laws by subjecting drivers to vehicle checks in accordance with Title 20 VIC Section 402. Unfortunately, due to the lack of resources, officers, and a location to conduct automobiles for hire cosmetic inspections we are unable to follow through with the mandates as written. It appears that many taxicab operators are not up to date with the rules and regulations governing them, which then contributes significantly to lack of compliance and to operators' perception that they are being improperly cited for violations. Ensuring that prospective taxi operators are provided the rules and regulations during the taxi license training classes, and a refresher course at least every three years should alleviate any concerns of biased enforcement and reduce the perception or incidences of police misconduct that may stem from officers' enforcement of taxi regulations.

### **EXECUTION OF PENALTIES, & CITATION RECORDS**

- 1) TCCs inspector/enforcement officers are authorized to issue administrative citations to an automobile for hire operator when, based upon personal investigation, the officer has reasonable cause to believe that the operator has committed an infraction in violation of Title 20 VIC 401 et seq, or any rule and regulation of the Taxicab Commission thereof.
- 2) TCCs inspector/enforcement officer may also issue Superior Court citations for traffic violations.
- 3) Prior to issuing a citation, the officer shall provide notice to the automobile for hire operator that they have committed a violation of the Virgin Islands Code and/or Taxi Rules and Regulations and may pay the violation or appear for an administrative hearing.

- 4) A citation issued by an inspector/enforcement officer shall contain the following:
  - a. The citation number(s).
  - b. Description of the violation.
  - c. Specific time and place where the violation occurred.
  - d. The operator's license plate and driver's license numbers.
  - e. Administrative hearing date and time.
  - f. The name of the inspector/enforcement officer.
- 5) FY2022 – August 2023 a total of (5) taxi citations were issued, and from September 2023 to present a total of (10) taxi citations have been issued.

While we are aware there are many automobiles for hire violations occurring daily, due to the understaffing of inspectors/enforcement officers and budgetary constraints, the Agency is unable to maximize its potential to enforce the rules and regulations of the Commission.

#### **CURRENT INITIATIVES:**

Within the next couple of months, the Commission intends to initiate the recruitment process for two (2) Inspector/Enforcement Officers for the island of St. Croix, two (2) for the island of St. Thomas which shall also service the island of St. John, in addition to designating a Chief of Enforcement. Currently, we have no inspector/enforcement officer on the island of St. Croix, and only 2 (two) that service St. Thomas and St. John, with one of those officers being out on medical leave since early January.

**CLOSING:**

Taxicabs play an important role in sustainable transportation. The ability to provide prompt and reliable taxi services may prove to be more economical and diminish the need to own our own vehicles. At the same time, taxi medallion owners and operators are struggling with the current licensing structure of limousines by the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs which technically is conflicting because limousines are, in fact, automobiles for hire, although 20 VIC Section 401 (h) says they are “not automobiles for hire.” If they are not automobiles for hire exactly, what business are they being licensed to conduct. The truth remains that limousines are infringing on the business of taxi medallion owners and operators due to the lack of regulations and enforcement by the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs.

However, without having a well-staffed and dedicated enforcement unit automobiles for hire industry operators will continue to violate the rules and regulations that governs the business for which they are licensed. Thank you for providing me the opportunity to present an update of the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commissions’ Enforcement Unit.

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