



VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

January 20, 2026

Honorable Kenneth L. Gittens
Senator
36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands
#3022 Estate Golden Rock
Christiansted, VI 00820

Dear Senator Kenneth Gittens:

Greetings, Senator, to you and your staff.

Thank you for your inquiry into the status of the St. Croix morgue and medical examiner. I can assure you that difficulties and obstacles encountered in obtaining a morgue on St. Croix and getting medical examiners paid have been a severe frustration, not only for the people of the Virgin Islands, but to me as well. I can assure you the delays have not been for a lack of trying. The background and status on those matters is as follows.

Three years ago, my predecessor Attorney General had arranged the purchase of a modular morgue, which was transported to St. Croix and stored on the Port Authority's property until a permanent site could be located and prepared to house the facility. In order for DOJ's medical examiners to perform their work, a memorandum of understanding was entered into with the Juan F. Luis Hospital (JFL) on St. Croix, which at that time had an autopsy facility.

When I came on as Acting Attorney General in mid-2024, no site had yet been prepared for the mobile morgue, and JFL's autopsy facility was not functional. The procedure that I met was for bodies requiring autopsy to be flown to St. Thomas, where DOJ had a fully functional autopsy suite and morgue, and then returned to St. Croix after autopsy. To try and cure this situation, I explored two routes. First, I approached JFL to see if their autopsy suite could be made functional, but plumbing and other problems ruled that solution out. We then examined several

St. Thomas

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St. Croix

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possible sites for the mobile morgue, including the vacant area where the Ralph de Chabert project once stood. This process took several months and led us to conclude that the most efficient and cost-effective move was to erect the modular morgue at the now-vacant lot near Golden Grove where the Toro building had been located, and where some initial work necessary for installation had already been undertaken. Hoping to move the modular morgue to that site soon, we had the land cleared.

Since then, several developments have frustrated our efforts. First, another company purchased the contractor – VESTA – that had been hired by my predecessor to oversee the work. That meant that the contract had to be re-negotiated and the terms subjected to a lengthy review and back-and-forth process with Property and Procurement (DPP) and other government departments. In addition, funding that DOJ had designated for the morgue project was unexpectedly no longer available, which led to an arduous process of finding sufficient money to fund the project. As a consequence, we have had to continue transporting bodies from St. Croix to St. Thomas to be autopsied. During calendar year 2025, a total of 52 bodies from the St. Croix district were transported to the St. Thomas district at a total cost of \$112,000.00.

I am happy to report, however, that we now have the funds necessary to complete the morgue on St. Croix, and my Chief Deputy Attorney General Ian Clement has brought the contract negotiations to near conclusion. We expect to have a final approved contract within the next week or so, which will make it possible to have a morgue and autopsy suite assembled and operable on Saint Croix in April of this year.

You inquired about the condition and costs of the modular morgue currently housed with the Port Authority. It has been there for three years and routinely needs to have its waterproof tarp cover repaired or replaced. We had the building itself examined recently, and it is in generally good shape, although it does need a few repairs which we have been assured can be done in short order. I must thank the Port Authority and its Executive Director Carlton Dowe for providing DOJ a place to temporarily house the structure at no cost.

Trained medical examiners, as you know, are critical for performing autopsies. When I joined DOJ, the Department had two independent contractors, Drs. Pender and Landron, performing autopsies for the Territory. In 2025, DPP asked that we put them on contract, and the contract for Dr. Pender, who performed autopsies for St. Croix, was completed before year's end. The contract provided that she was to be paid for any outstanding invoices, which DOJ had already submitted for payment, but due to bureaucratic issues outside of DOJ's control, that did not happen. Although I understand that her pending invoices have now finally been paid, she has understandably resigned in frustration.

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As for Dr. Landron, he, too, was owed payment for several invoices which I have been informed have now been paid. He is staying on as the sole medical examiner for the Territory. However, I have been informed that he has completed all pending autopsies, including those for St. Croix, so autopsies. To answer your inquiry, the number of outstanding or backlogged cases in the St. Croix District is currently zero. To help ensure that it stays that way, we are in the process of trying to recruit a second medical examiner, as the workload requires at least two such pathologists. We have located a few possible recruits and have made hiring a suitable second medical examiner a top priority.

I trust this answers your questions about the status of the St. Croix morgue and of the medical examiners. I assure you that these matters are among my top priorities and I believe we are near the end of what has been a long and tortuous road. I must stress that the reason for the delays has not been neglect or inadvertence by DOJ; rather, it has been the result of factors out of DOJ's control.

Sincerely,

Gordon C. Rhea
Attorney General