



Government of
The Virgin Islands of the United States



VIRGIN ISLANDS POLICE DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE POLICE COMMISSIONER

RAY A. MARTINEZ
Police Commissioner

March 4, 2024

Honorable Senator Milton E. Potter
Chairperson, Committee on Disaster Recovery,
Infrastructure, and Planning
35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands
Capitol Building
St. Thomas, VI 00804

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Re: Invitation to Provide Testimony on Amendment to Bill No. 35-0196, GERS Peace Officers

Dear Senator Potter:

Thank you for providing the Virgin Islands Police Department the opportunity to offer testimony on an amendment to Bill No. 35-0196, an Act amending Title 5, Chapter 305, Section 3561, Subsection (a), granting Peace officer status to qualified enforcement officers of the Government Employee Retirement System. VIPD had an opportunity to peruse the amendment and support this measure as it allows the Department to widen its personnel and create more avenues to address public safety in one of our largest tourist areas.

Peace Officers employed with GERS would lend heavily to the Tourism Oriented Policing initiative on GERS property and the neighboring highly traversed tourist areas. Moreover, VIPD's resources could be transferred to other areas of need. In short, we welcome confirming such status to said officers to assist in providing a more robust public safety experience for our tourist product. Law enforcement agencies around the nation continue to experience common tourist-oriented patrol issues in the areas we will be able to cover upon conferring Peace Officer Status as referenced. Among the major problems are:

- Lack of finances. Law enforcement agencies interviewed stated that despite the importance of tourism to their local economy, city, state, provincial, or national governments did not provide those agencies with the proper level of funding. There was a common perception that governments want tourists to receive extraordinary services within the confines of ordinary budgets. Often law enforcement agents suffer from low morale due in part to low pay and lack of resources.

- Personnel shortages. Police departments indicated that increasing uniformed personnel in high traffic areas is a major way to prevent crime. However, due to budget constraints, and in the case of regulations regarding compensatory time, efforts by police departments are limited. This results in the inability of departments to schedule the requisite number of patrols in dense tourist areas.

- Need for greater community cooperation. Law enforcement agencies cannot completely end crime. Instead, they must depend on the local population, and the tourism industry in particular, to help them fight crime prior to the occurrence of an incident. Law enforcement agencies see prevention as

their best tool, especially when there exists the opportunity to forge relationships with enforcement units and the business community.

We imagine that the use of GERS Peace Officers would be like that of the officers positioned at the Roy Lester Schneider Hospital and the Juan F. Luis Hospital. Specifically, GERS officers would be responsible for the tourism intensive area in and around the GERS property.

Based upon the information provided herein, we wholeheartedly support this measure.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ray A. Martinez', written over a faint, illegible background.

Ray A. Martinez
Police Commissioner