

1                   **35th LEGISLATURE OF THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS**  
2                   **COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY, JUSTICE**  
3                   **AND PUBLIC SAFETY**  
4                   **SENATOR KENNETH L. GITTENS - CHAIR**

5  
6                   **VIRGIN ISLANDS POLICE DEPARTMENT**  
7                   **FY2024 HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS**  
8                   **TESTIMONY**

9  
10                   **June 11, 2024**

11  
12  
13                   Honorable Kenneth L. Gittens – Chairman of the Committee on  
14 Homeland Security, Justice and Public Safety - Committee Members, other  
15 members of the 35th Legislature, fellow testifiers and colleagues, those in the  
16 listening and viewing audience... people of these beautiful United States  
17 Virgin Islands, Good morning!

18                   I am Mario M. Brooks, Assistant Commissioner of the Virgin Islands  
19 Police Department, and today I am pleased to represent the United States  
20 Virgin Islands Police Department (VIPD) on behalf of the Honorable Ray A.  
21 Martinez, Police Commissioner of the Virgin Islands Police Department.  
22 Today, I appear before you with the goal of presenting updates on the  
23 department’s preparations as we enter the 2024 hurricane season, which  
24 began on June 1st and will officially end on November 30th.

25           The 2024 hurricane predictions for the Caribbean indicate an active  
26 season, with a higher-than-average number of named storms and several  
27 expected to reach hurricane strength. This outlook underscores the  
28 importance of robust preparation and vigilant response measures for our  
29 community.

30           The Virgin Islands Police Department (VIPD) remains results-focused  
31 in its deliverables to the people of the territory. Commissioner Ray Martinez  
32 and the rest of the executive team have created an environment of support  
33 for police officers to be in a state of readiness. As the lead agency for  
34 Emergency Support Function 13 (ESF-13) Public Safety & Security, the VIPD  
35 continues to collaborate seamlessly with local and federal partners, focusing  
36 on stabilizing the critical Community Lifeline of Safety & Security. This  
37 includes maintaining law and order, site security, access control, and traffic  
38 control, especially during evacuations or any mass movement of people and  
39 critical operational supplies.

40           Under Virgin Island Code, Title 23, the VITEMA Act, the Governor may  
41 authorize the use of Territory resources by declaring a “State of Emergency.”  
42 Upon Governor Bryan's prompt declaration of a pre-landfall state of  
43 emergency, a pivotal action occurs: all executive branch law enforcement  
44 agencies across the territory promptly report to the Police Commissioner,

45 making themselves available for mission assignments. Additionally, we have  
46 memorandums of understanding (MOU) with the Virgin Islands Supreme  
47 Court and the Virgin Islands Legislature for the utilization of their  
48 enforcement personnel.

49 The Virgin Islands National Guard also stands ready to lend support to  
50 the VIPD, deploying either full-time force members or activating M-day or  
51 its traditional membership under State Active-Duty orders, strengthening  
52 our collective response effort. Requests for military support for law  
53 enforcement missions will be coordinated between the Commissioner of the  
54 VI Police Department and the Adjutant General of the VI National Guard and  
55 then forwarded by the Commissioner to the Governor for approval.

56 Effective ongoing coordination between VITEMA, VI Port Authority,  
57 and the US Coast Guard ensures timely deployment of both Police and  
58 National Guard resources throughout the territory, preempting any port  
59 closures that may impede their mission. In the event of a disaster  
60 declaration, the VIPD can swiftly request additional law enforcement  
61 resources through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact  
62 (EMAC), engaging key partners of participating member states for support  
63 such as Puerto Rico, New York and others.

64 Notably, a significant enhancement to this year's hurricane  
65 preparedness and response capabilities is the utilization of the VIPD  
66 unmanned aerial systems (UAS) or drones. These advanced drones play a  
67 pivotal role in conducting search and rescue missions, providing aerial  
68 analysis of various communities for damage assessment, and supporting  
69 escort efforts and crowd control at Points of Distribution (POD) sites when  
70 the need arises. This aerial support capability greatly bolsters the  
71 effectiveness of response and support operations.

72 In addition to aerial support, the VIPD Marine assets have become  
73 indispensable in fulfilling the critical need for community support. In the  
74 event of port closures at the Cyril E. King Airport (CEKA) and the Henry  
75 Rolston Airport (HERA), these assets are instrumental in facilitating the  
76 movement of manpower and supplies throughout the district islands,  
77 ensuring the swift and efficient response to the demands of the community  
78 during emergencies.

79 Moreover, upon the establishment of a curfew by Governor Bryan, the  
80 VIPD institutes traffic control points (TCP) across the islands. These TCPs  
81 are strategically placed to ensure road safety and to effectively control  
82 unauthorized traffic on the roads during times of curfew. The TCPs are  
83 designed to provide freedom of movement for those critical supplies and

84 support elements across the islands. The VIPD continues its vital support to  
85 key agencies, including the Water & Power Authority and the Department of  
86 Public Works. These departments are extremely critical to the restoration of  
87 our community.

88 The VIPD remains responsive to 9-1-1 calls until the onset of Tropical  
89 Storm Force winds (at speeds of 39 mph), after which they shelter in place  
90 until the storm passes, and sustained winds drop below Tropical Storm Force  
91 levels. This comprehensive approach underscores the VIPD's unwavering  
92 commitment to the safety and security of the community in the ever-evolving  
93 landscape of emergency response in 2024.

## 94 **CONCLUSION**

95 Honorable Senator Kenneth L. Gittens and members of this body,  
96 thank you for giving us this opportunity today. I thank Governor Albert  
97 Bryan, Jr., Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach, and Commissioner  
98 Martinez for their continued leadership, guidance, and support. To the entire  
99 VIPD family, thank you for your unwavering support. To the people of the  
100 Virgin Islands who we proudly serve, you play an integral role in helping the  
101 Virgin Islands Police Department support you. Let us continue to help each  
102 other. The team and I stand ready to answer your questions.