

**THIRTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE OF THE U.S.**  
**VIRGIN ISLANDS**  
**COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY, JUSTICE, AND**  
**PUBLIC SAFETY**

**Chairman: The Honorable Kenneth Gittens**

**Virgin Islands Police Department**

**St. Croix, USVI**

**September 10, 2024**

Honorable Kenneth L. Gittens – Chairman of the Committee on Homeland Security, Justice and Public Safety - Committee Members, other members of the 35th Legislature, fellow testifiers and colleagues and those in the listening and viewing audience, good afternoon.

I am Sidney Elskoe, Assistant Commissioner of the Virgin Islands Police Department, and today I am pleased to represent the United States Virgin Islands Police Department (VIPD) on behalf of Mario M. Brooks, Acting Police Commissioner of the Virgin Islands Police Department. Today, I appear before you with the goal of presenting updates on the department's key initiatives aimed at enhancing roadway safety. I am pleased to be accompanied by the Office of Highway Safety Director Ms. Daphne O'Neal and Traffic Division Commanders Arthur Joseph of the St Croix district and Joycelyn Lee-Bobb of the St. Thomas/ St. John district respectively.

Traffic safety is one of the most important responsibilities of the Virgin Islands Police Department. Our duties include but are not limited to upholding traffic regulations,

conducting accident investigations, monitoring sobriety checkpoints, managing traffic flow, and providing public education on safe driving practices. Additionally, our efforts include addressing issues such as speeding, impaired driving, and vehicle maintenance in order to diminish accidents and enhance overall road safety.

The Virgin Islands Police Department leads several operations to improve upon an environment in which vehicular traffic safety and accountability on our public roads and highways is further enhanced. A brief overview of our efforts includes:

### **License Plate Compliance**

It has become clear; many members of the motoring public have mistakenly taken the position that displaying license plates on vehicles while operating on the roadway is optional. As part of our testimony today we take this opportunity to remind all drivers that operating a motor vehicle on the road is not a human right. It is a privilege afforded to those who have proved through a legally mandated process that the driver can safely operate a motor vehicle amongst others. Vehicles driven on the public roadway must be inspected then registered, deeming them safe for operation amid other vehicles, pedestrians and physical infrastructure in close proximity to the roadway. The law, V.I. Code title. 20, § 334, cites in summary, when two license plates are issued, two plates shall be displayed. One plate must be affixed to the front of the body of the vehicle and the other to the rear, and both plates must be clearly visible from the front and rear of the vehicle. That being said, operational improvements are being made to how the law is enforced by our Agency. The Virgin Islands Police Department is currently utilizing our Traffic Division to address vehicles being operated on the roadway that are non-

compliant with law. Operators that are found to be in violation of law, risk receiving a citation and having their vehicle towed off the roadway.

### **Traffic Safety Initiative Plan**

Chiefs in both districts have executed a "Traffic Safety Initiative Plan."

The objective of the operation is to reduce impaired driving and texting while operating a motor vehicle by issuing citations and increasing public awareness of road safety.

Information gathered during the initiative will be processed and forwarded to the Office of Highway Safety for further analysis.

Chiefs of Police in both districts have led the charge to address the matter of persons operating unlicensed dirt bikes, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) and scooters on our roadways. The law, V.I. Code title. 20, § 334, section b, indicates bikes of any kind shall be required to carry a license plate and there shall be a tail-lamp, or a separate lamp so constructed and placed on the vehicle as to illuminate with a white light the rear plate and render it clearly legible for a distance of 50 feet to the rear. Many of these vehicles, particularly dirt bikes, cannot be licensed because they physically are unable to have a license plate or taillight affixed to its rear. Our efforts have been challenging to say the least. The demand for and importation of these vehicles has been prolific. The Achilles Heel hampering our efforts in this area is policy related. The VI Police Department operational policy prevents the pursuit of dirt bikes and motorcycles. A traffic stop of a person riding a motorcycle is typically immediately followed by the user leaving the encounter at a high rate of speed. Often fast enough in which the operator risks injury or

death. As a result, the policy was implemented to prevent officers from executing excessive risk versus the reward of issuing a citation.

The community reaches out to the Virgin Islands Police Department on a regular basis regarding illegally operated motor bikes. They not only complain about the irresponsible manner in which they are operated, but also the excessive noise they create. We would like to collaborate with this body to create solutions to this problem.

### **Office of Highway Safety**

The Office of Highway Safety in the Virgin Islands Police Department continues to focus on reducing traffic crashes and improving road safety by implementing programs, conducting safety campaigns, and assisting with enforcement strategies to promote safer driving practices. Some of the unit's more high-profile programs are Occupant Protection (adult and child passenger safety) and Impaired Driving (DUI, cell phone use, texting, drowsy driving, anything that distracts the driver while operating a vehicle) through education and outreach to foster prevention.

The members of the Virgin Islands Police Department remain committed to ensuring our roads and highways are safe for everyone. The personnel of the Virgin Islands Police Department, sworn and civilian, remain dedicated to the mission of increased safety and security. I would like to thank this body for the opportunity to testify today.

The team and I are now available to answer any questions you may have.