

**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**

**April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2023**

Good morning to the Chair, The Honorable Kenneth Gittens, Legislative body and Staff, Members of the VIPD Executive Team, and to the Members of the listening and viewing audience. My name is Sidney Elskoe, Acting Assistant Commissioner of Police for the United States Virgin Islands Police Department. We thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding the organization's current capital projects, disaster recovery status, current operational status, training and recruitment efforts. The Virgin Islands Police Department has made several progressive advancements in how we serve the public and continue to address the number one problem plaguing this community. That problem is gun-related violence.

**Operations**

The Operations Division, managed by the Chiefs of Police in the St. Thomas/St. John and St. Croix Districts have been successful and made significant advances in solving and preventing crimes by nurturing a closer relationship with the community we serve. Chief Phillip on St. Thomas and Chief Santos on St. Croix have employed a "focused deterrence" approach to solving

crimes and preventing criminal activity before it happens. A focused, intelligence led approach to law enforcement is essential in our current environment. Simplified law enforcement is the examination of patterns. The Virgin Islands Police Department is now more dependent on utilizing intelligence to determine how we deploy our resources. The United States Virgin Islands is not a lawless land which is ripe for sporadic criminal activity that cannot be predicted. The peaceful, law-abiding residents of the Virgin Islands are victimized by a small section of the community; recidivists who capitalize on the loopholes of an organized system of lawful due process and a common mindset which plagues small communities. That mindset being one which understandably causes our residents to shy away from reporting criminal activity fearing as a result, they may become victims of criminal activity themselves. The Chiefs now have access to technology that acts as a nameless electronic witness that is fearless and cannot be threatened. Those technologies include visual traffic surveillance and gunfire detection sensors commonly referred to as Shotspotter. To date, there has been several operations across the territory that have been successful in netting numerous illegal firearms. We will continue to focus on the transportation of those firearms along the highways of the Virgin Islands because it is through this practice that those firearms are being utilized for crimes of a deadly nature.

Efforts to improve relations between the community and the Police Department have yielded results greater than expected. The Chiefs and Executives in the Criminal Investigation Bureau have noted an increase in community involvement which have led to an improved case closure rate. Our gratitude to the people of the Virgin Islands for their support cannot be put into words. It is through this much improved relationship that we will continue to realize a reduction in gun violence in our community.

## **Information Technology**

VIPD is working with BIT and Property & Procurement on the contractual process for an in-car mobile routing and network connection project to improve our communication capabilities. This solution will enable officers network access to key resources such as our incident and accident report systems while out in the field. In simpler terms, this means an officer will have the capability to write reports in their assigned vehicles. They will be able to remain on post instead of spending long periods of time off the street while completing administrative duties.

The department has deployed several body-worn cameras to support daily operations. The body worn camera solution enables the department with an efficient process to share the video footage within a secure environment to the prosecutor's office and other entities and most importantly, the asset ensures accountability on behalf of our employees and the community we serve. Currently, every uniformed officer of the Virgin Islands Police Department is equipped with a body worn camera. Additional funding has been requested through the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) to expand our Body Worn Camera program to outfit all sworn personnel with a body worn camera. Body worn cameras will also be loaned to officers from outside agencies that partner with VIPD. The ShotSpotter program coverage area has been expanded in the Virgin Islands. The department is working with the vendor on testing the integration of cameras with the ShotSpotter system. This will enable the cameras that are in the coverage area of the sensors, to provide visual coverage for the alerts thereby improving our already efficient gunfire detection and response system.

## **Real-Time Crime Center**

The Virgin Islands Police Department is currently undergoing the initial plans to establish its Real Time Crime Center (RTCC) within the U.S. Virgin Islands. The RTCC will offer cutting-edge technological approaches to crime-fighting capabilities and will assist the VIPD and other law enforcement entities with another Crime Fighting Tool. The current approach consists of partnering with one of the leading software companies in establishing Real Time Crime Centers. In the upcoming weeks, we are moving forward with conversations with different vendors for the build-out of the center and location solidification.

It has been the vision of Commissioner Ray Martinez to build and commission an RTCC in either district. The RTCC will provide the Virgin Islands Police Department with enhanced situational awareness, improved crime prevention and reduction, improved agency collaboration, enhanced investigative capabilities, data-driven decision making, and enhanced community engagement.

## **Training**

Law enforcement training is essential to ensure that officers have the abilities, and expertise, required to professionally protect and serve their communities, reduce risks, ensure officer safety, and advance public safety. In order to support law enforcement agencies' role of upholding public safety and maintaining public trust, thorough and ongoing training programs are crucial. There is an ever-present need to recruit new, qualified individuals to serve as peace officers as well as keeping current officers trained at optimal levels. The foundation of everything this organization does rests upon knowledge. This is the responsibility of our Training Division.

Currently there is a class of 14 recruits on each island. On St. Thomas there are 9 candidates for the position of Police Officer and 4 on St. Croix. There are 7 candidates for the position of Police Auxiliary in each district. The remainder on each island are being trained for the position of Peace Officer in other government agencies which include, the Port Authority, Superior Court, Bureau of Corrections, Waste Management, the Legislature, and the Executive Security Unit. Recruiting has been a challenge. We have launched an aggressive recruiting effort with the goal of increasing the number of sworn personnel in the department. We have seen an increase of Auxiliary Officer interest to the police department. We have also implemented the Community Service Officers (CSO) program. This program was initially started to bridge the gap of time of personnel who had successfully completed the application process but were in a standby mode awaiting the start of an academy. It has now grown into a process that has provided the department with critically slotted employees who by the time of graduation from the police academy are now experienced in that area of previous CSO assignment.

Recently the Noise Pollution Control Act has been passed and we are in the process of acquiring noise meter devices as well as providing the certification and training for those devices. It is our goal to ensure that our personnel have the necessary equipment to enforce this law effectively. We anticipate that there will be challenges but as always we are confident that we will prevail.

As the primary law enforcement agency within the US Virgin Islands, we have prepared to respond to Active Shooter events which have become all too common in the mainland. In November of 2022 the training division held a real-life active shooter scenario training in both districts. Officers were paired up for training purposes and were required to respond to an active shooter scenario. We utilized theatrical methods such as visual effects and realistic, blank ammunition typically known as “simunition” systems to ensure that this process was as real as possible. This type of

training placed the Officers in real-life scenarios and they were evaluated on their response. The evaluations were done by certified Use of Force Instructors. In January 2023, officers and supervisors attended simulator training in both districts. Officers were evaluated by certified Use of Force instructors. Scenarios were also developed to be consistent with officer's current assignments and are as realistic as possible.

### **Capital Projects**

The Patrick Sweeney Police Headquarters project on St. Croix is well underway. Concept design for the project has begun and a conceptual design package will soon be presented. Soil studies are to be continued once the concept design is approved by the department.

The current project status of the Alexander Farrelly Justice Center is that we are pending FEMA Program Delivery Management Group review. VIPD has made some temporary repairs in order to continue using the building. When permanent repairs are scheduled, temporary space will be needed to relocate daily operations of the Virgin Islands Police Department and the Bureau of Corrections. Project completion is estimated for year 2026.

The Leander Jurgen Command Police Station project awaits completion of as-built drawings. As with the Farrelly Complex it is our goal to relocate the operations to a temporary location while the repairs are being completed on the Jurgen Command building.

The Virgin Islands Police Department is making great progress on the St. Croix Motor Pool and Training Academy's generator projects. The Department of Public Works has delivered the designs and Federal Consistency Report following our Pre-Application Meeting that was held on February 28, 2023. All generator buildings will be elevated to prevent flooding related damage. Designs are 90% complete and we plan to receive the full designs before the end of the month.

The Department successfully completed the implementation of the Body-Worn Cameras program. From the \$300,000 grant, the Department has purchased over 200 body-worn cameras, conducted training on the deployment and proper use of those units, and developed a body-worn camera policy. This grant has met all grant requirements and is currently in the close out process.

The Department is currently working on a Capital Improvement Project totaling \$1,500,000 to purchase over 200 cameras, which consist of fixed cameras, Point Tilt Zoom (PTZ) cameras, and license plate reader cameras. These cameras will be affixed in clusters at key locations on the islands of St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John. The cameras will be further supported with the addition of ShotSpotter sensors to further bolster VIPD's response time and effectiveness in fighting crime in the Territory. To date, the Department continues to partner with the Bureau of Information Technology to secure a contract with a vendor that meets all federal grant requirements and has the capacity to undertake such a large project. Once the contract is executed, the Department will begin the procurement process to continue the administration of the grant.

### **Recruitment**

Our Human Resources Division has led the charge regarding Recruitment. The Human Resources office of the Virgin Islands Police Department is actively engaged in efforts to strengthen our workforce, as well as enhance the morale of our dedicated officers and staff. Our participation in Career Fairs hosted by the Division of Personnel and the Department of Labor, in each district, combined with a recent recruitment survey all contribute to building a strong, capable, and motivated team committed to ensuring the safety and well-being of our community.

Approximately two months ago, Human Resources conducted a recruitment survey via local internet media to collect data that will assist in refining and enhancing our recruitment efforts. This invaluable information will enable us to better understand the factors that motivate individuals to join our force and guide us in designing targeted campaigns that resonate with prospective officers.

Alongside our recruitment initiatives, the Human Resources department has organized a variety of employee appreciation events aimed at boosting morale and fostering a sense of camaraderie among our dedicated employees. These events are crucial in recognizing the tireless work of our team members, who serve our community with unwavering commitment and professionalism.

It has become a priority to promote career advancement within our ranks. In order to further support career growth and development, our department is moving forward with promotion examinations conducted by the Division of Personnel for the Captain, Lieutenant, and Sergeant ranks territorially. This important step recognizes the hard work and dedication of our officers and provides them with opportunities for advancement, ultimately contributing to a more experienced and knowledgeable leadership team.

In conclusion, the Virgin Islands Police Department would like to emphasize, in order to win the war on violent crime, the community and all territorial law enforcement agencies must remain unified. We are in this together! The members of the Virgin Islands Police Department are committed to creating a safe environment for everyone. The men and women of the Virgin Islands Police Department 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.