**THIRTHY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS**

**COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY, JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY**

**Chairman Kenneth L. Gittens**

**Tuesday, October 10, 2023**

Good morning Honorable Kenneth L. Gittens, Chairman of the Committee on Homeland Security, Justice and Public Safety, Committee Members, members of the 35th Legislature, legislative staff, members of my Executive Team, and to the listening and viewing audience. I am Ray A. Martinez, Police Commissioner of Virgin Islands Police Department. Thank you for providing my team and I the opportunity to testify on Bill Number 35-0131, “an Act amending Title 3 Virgin Islands Code, Chapter 15 to establish a “Real Time Crime Center” Centralized Crime Data System, within the Virgin Islands Police Department.

Mr. Chair, I sit before you today in support of this Real Time Crime Center (RTCC) legislation and the recommended appropriation of $2,500,000. The VIPD RTCC is intended to be a centralized data hub that rapidly mines information from multiple crime databases and disseminates that information to officers in the field. Daily, officers and detectives in the field encounter criminals, victims, witnesses, and complainants in various settings. Each individual and each place has a relevant history; for example, individuals may have previous arrests and outstanding warrants, and geographic areas have unique crime rates and trends. This data is stored in various databases that require significant time to sift through and gather the data and more times than not, are only available during normal business hours. Without immediate access to this information, police personnel are hard pressed to make the quick connections and deductions necessary for effective policing.

There are over 120 Real Time Crime Centers in the US and number continues to rise. RTCCs provide officers in the field with pertinent information nearly instantaneously and has proven to be an effective crime-fighting tool that facilitates proactive policing. Whereas officers once had to return from the field to sift through pages and pages of records to find information related to an investigation, the RTCC now provides them with information pertaining to their assignments before they even make it to the scene.

VIPD’s law enforcement philosophy is focused on effective crime control and a strong community presence, enhanced through the integration of crime analysis and technologically advanced systems that serve as a force multiplier. VIPD has delved into expanding its innovative use of technology in policing to further enhance VIPD’s capabilities for solving crime in real time.

VIPD operates two camera rooms with access to over 80 surveillance cameras and 20 automated license plate readers. Phases 2 and 3 of the surveillance system integrations will almost triple the number of available cameras. The present system provides significant information to investigators however none is available in real time thereby decreasing some of its effectiveness. Moreover, the system lacks a common operating platform that provides the capability to unify data systems.

In mid-2022 VIPD began a framework for developing its RTCC based upon 5 tenets.

* + Developing an RTCC utilizing crime analysis and data solution capabilities that unify a common operating picture to intervene in crime in real time and to investigate after the fact
  + Integrating VIPD’s surveillance camera network into the RTCC along with the camera networks of public agency stakeholders, in addition to private/public partnerships with the business and residential community for access to their public facing cameras
  + Obtaining a summary of hardware and software enhancements that would be useful for establishing an effective RTCC that further integrates the situational awareness provided by the 9-1-1 Emergency Call Center with the data-driven capabilities of VIPD’s Planning, Research, and Development Bureau
  + Locating a suitable and secure space to house the center
  + And, identifying, recruiting, and hiring capable RTCC crime analysis and staff members

In October 2022, VIPD requested and was awarded $2M in priority funding from the Department of Interior, Capital Improvement Project Grant to fund development of the VIPD Real Time Crime Center. Funding covers remodel/build-out, center design, IT infrastructure, camera walls, associated technology, furniture and equipment. As this funding could only cover one center, the decision was made to build the center in the St. Croix district with intentions of seeking funding thereafter for a center for the St. Thomas, St. John District. A Center Manager and 5 crime analyst positions were budgeted for utilizing ARPA funding with the understanding those positions would be absorbed into VIPD’s General Fund Budget once exhausted.

Understanding the complexities to “constitutionally police”, we continue to dialogue with partner agencies with RTCCs to gain insight into legally accepted best practices. We are in the process of completing a draft policy that will be forwarded to the VI Attorney General’s Office and US DOJ for approval. The policy will serve as a guide to ensuring information obtained or shared by the Center will be used for its intended and allowable purposes. Written guidance will also be obtained from the VI Attorney General’s Office with regards to public information sharing, surveillance video and images chain of custody, and data storage.

It is clear policing continues to evolve quickly with the adoption and implementation of new technology, greater community access to video, improved transparency, and more efficient responses to crimes in progress. The development and evolution of VIPD’s RTCC will certainly improve operational efficiency in many situations and across all local law enforcement agencies. Further, the expanded use of video and other technologies can greatly improve the chances of capturing some offenders in real time and can substantially improve the likelihood of convictions in the future. The VIPD RTCC would have the ability to access surveillance cameras, search firearm registries, view officer body worn cameras, access local criminal records, and track electronically monitored pre-trial suspects to name a few.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on Bill No. 35-0131. Passage of this legislation will lend tremendously to supporting our law enforcement efforts. My Team and I stand ready to answer your questions.