

**THIRTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN
ISLANDS
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY, JUSTICE, AND
PUBLIC SAFETY
Chairperson Kenneth L. Gittens
Tuesday, December 12, 2023**

Good morning Honorable Kenneth L. Gittens, Chairperson 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, here this morning to provide an overview of the department's preparations for the upcoming Crucian Christmas Festival. Our preparations underscore our shared commitment to ensuring the safety and security of our community during this significant event.

The Crucian Christmas Festival, a jewel in the crown of the United States Virgin Islands, is more than just a celebration; it is a vibrant expression of our rich cultural heritage and a significant contributor to our local economy, attracting tourists from around the world. The festival's history is deeply interwoven with the story of our islands, showcasing our unique traditions and the spirit of our people. We are also honored once again to host the President of the United States, an event that not only elevates the island's and festival's stature

but also highlights our capacity to manage high-profile events with utmost efficiency and security.

While the safety of the President and all our guests is a partnered effort involving our federal and local counterparts, the VIPD plays a pivotal role in ensuring that every citizen and visitor enjoys a safe and protected festival environment. It is imperative to note that the specifics of our operational plans are sensitive and must remain confidential to ensure their effectiveness. However, I can assure this committee that our strategies are comprehensive, innovative, and tailored to address the unique challenges of such a large-scale and high-profile event.

At the forefront of our operational plan is the deployment of the VIPD's mobile command station, a state-of-the-art hub that once mobilized, connects, and serves as our onsite communications center. This advanced setup allows for instantaneous response and access to real-time surveillance of the Festival Village and immediate areas, dispatch capabilities, and comprehensive communication channels. For the duration of the Crucian Christmas Festival, we will be deploying temporary cameras, utilizing our drone resources and various forms of digital equipment, enhancing our surveillance capabilities, and ensuring a wide coverage of the Frederiksted downtown area with foot patrols. The synergy between the mobile command and the off-site camera center is crucial, as they operate both independently and in tandem, providing redundant systems that ensure uninterrupted monitoring and rapid response to any situation.

Reflecting on last year's events, our proactive approach and technological advancements led to several significant successes. Notable among these were the arrests of individuals in possession of illegal firearms. These interventions, made possible by our vigilant officers and advanced surveillance, prevented potential escalations, and maintained the overall peace of the festival. Our strategy of blending boots on the ground with digital surveillance has proven to be effective, enabling us to intervene promptly in altercations and maintain a safe environment for all attendees.

The success of our operations hinges on the unwavering dedication and expertise of our VIPD officers. Their commitment to public safety, especially during such large-scale events, is highly commendable. Our officers undergo diverse types of recurrent training, ensuring they are well-equipped to manage the complexities and challenges of event security. The diligence and professionalism displayed by our team are a testament to their commitment to safeguarding our community and upholding the law. As we prepare for this year's festival, I have utmost confidence in their abilities to effectively execute our plans thereby increasing overall efficiency that will ensure a safe and enjoyable experience for everyone involved.

Looking ahead, the Virgin Islands Police Department remains committed to continuous improvement and innovation in our security strategies. We are committed to exploring and implementing modern technologies and methodologies that enhance our capabilities to further public safety. This commitment extends beyond the Crucian

Christmas Festival, as we endeavor to maintain a high standard of security and peace in our community throughout the year. We pledge to keep engaging with our community, stakeholders, and federal partners to foster a collaborative approach towards a safer and more secure environment for all.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate the Virgin Islands Police Department's unwavering commitment to the safety and well-being of our community . The Crucian Christmas Festival is not just an event; it is a celebration of our culture, unity, and spirit. VIPD personnel take immense pride in their roles in ensuring its success. Together, we look forward to a successful and memorable Crucian Christmas Festival. I would be remiss if I did not take the opportunity to extend my heartfelt thanks and appreciation to VIPD's police officers and supervisors for their dedication and steadfast commitment to policing our community not only during Festival or Carnival, but throughout the year. Through your efforts, everyone can enjoy safe and joyous occasions. Thank you. My Team and I are available to answer your questions.