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COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,
JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Chairman: The Honorable Clifford A. Joseph Sr.

Virgin Islands Police Department

St. Croix, USVI

October 15th, 2026

BILL NO. 36-0318 (Sponsored by: Senator Kenneth L. Gittens)

Mr. Chairman, distinguished members of the Senate, good morning.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Dwayne Richards, Director of Human Resources for the Virgin Islands Police Department, and I am here on behalf of Police Commissioner Mario M. Brooks.

Today, we submit this testimony in support of Bill No. 36-0318, which seeks to amend Title 23, Virgin Islands Code, Chapter 13, to establish a Police Reserve Unit within the Virgin Islands Police Department.

I commend Senator Kenneth L. Gittens for bringing forward legislation that would provide the Virgin Islands Police Department with an additional mechanism to strengthen police manpower, expand community engagement, and increase our capacity to respond to the public-safety needs of our Territory. Law-enforcement agencies throughout the United States utilize reserve officers and other auxiliary personnel to supplement their full-time forces. This approach

recognizes a fundamental reality: public-safety demands can fluctuate significantly, while permanent staffing levels cannot always be adjusted with the same speed or flexibility.

The Los Angeles Police Department has used its Police Reserve Corps for targeted crime-suppression deployments. The Department also describes reserve officers as a connection between neighborhood residents and police, bringing community knowledge and professional experience to law-enforcement service.^[1]

The Phoenix Police Department provides a measurable example of the additional capacity a reserve program can deliver. In its 2024 Year-in-Review, the Department reported that its Reserve Division staffed 95 major events and provided 42,316 hours of service valued at more than \$5.3 million. Phoenix assigns reserve officers to patrol, homeland defense, and specialized units, including support during emergencies and special events. Reserve officers undergo the same hiring, background checks, and state certification training as career officers.^[2]

The Honolulu Police Department offers an example relevant to an island jurisdiction. Its reserve program traces its origins to Emergency Reserve Officers organized in 1941. Its current policy expressly identifies emergency police duties and additional police protection as the program's purpose. Honolulu requires approved recruit training, ongoing training, supervision, and performance evaluations for reserve officers.^[3, 4]

The San Francisco Police Department includes community members and retired police officers in its Reserve Police Officer Program. These officers supplement full-time personnel through vehicle, foot, and bicycle patrols. The program allows qualified individuals to continue serving while maintaining another career and provides a means for retired officers to contribute their experience.^[5]

The Virgin Islands Police Department faces many of these same challenges. Our department is responsible for providing continuous police services across St. Croix, St. Thomas,

St. John, and Water Island. At the same time, we must respond to major events, emergencies, natural disasters, special operations, significant criminal investigations, traffic-management requirements, community events, and periods of increased criminal activity. A properly structured Police Reserve Unit can provide the Department with an additional and controlled manpower resource without diminishing the importance or need for a professional, full-time police force.

These examples illustrate the potential benefits for the Virgin Islands. A properly managed Reserve Unit could provide additional personnel for patrol support, traffic control, community events, and emergency assignments while helping full-time officers maintain their regular responsibilities. Qualified retired officers who meet the applicable eligibility and certification requirements could also preserve institutional knowledge and mentor less experienced officers. Assigning reserve personnel to suitable duties may reduce pressure on overtime and officer fatigue, but those benefits must be evaluated against actual program costs and deployment needs.

The Reserve Unit should therefore be viewed as a force-multiplier, not a substitute for full-time police officers. The establishment of a Police Reserve Unit would provide the Commissioner of Police with another tool to assist the Chiefs of Police in managing periods of increased law-enforcement demand. This additional capacity becomes particularly valuable when the Department must maintain normal police operations while simultaneously responding to an extraordinary public-safety requirement.

A reserve component can help us meet those demands without unnecessarily drawing full-time officers away from critical calls for service, investigative responsibilities, routine patrol operations, or other essential functions. While we support the establishment of a Police Reserve Unit, we must emphasize that the quality, training, screening, supervision, and accountability of reserve personnel must never be compromised. The public deserves the same level of confidence in anyone exercising police authority, regardless of whether that individual serves in a full-time or

reserve capacity. For that reason, reserve personnel must be subject to clearly established qualifications, background investigations, training requirements, policies, and standards governing their conduct and exercise of police authority. Equally important is maintaining a clear chain of command. Reserve officers must understand when they are acting in an official capacity, what duties and authorities have been assigned to them, and who is responsible for their supervision.

There should never be uncertainty regarding whether a reserve officer is acting under the authority of the Virgin Islands Police Department, the scope of that officer's responsibilities, or the chain of command governing the assignment. Clear command and control will be essential to ensuring that the Reserve Unit operates safely, professionally, and consistently with the policies and mission of the Department. A Police Reserve Unit can also serve as an important bridge between the Department and the community. There are individuals throughout the Virgin Islands who possess valuable skills, experience, and a genuine desire to serve their communities. Some may have prior law-enforcement experience, military backgrounds, public-safety experience, emergency-response skills, or other specialized expertise that can benefit the Department.

A properly designed reserve program can provide these individuals with an avenue to contribute their time, experience, and abilities to the public-safety mission. It can also provide individuals interested in pursuing a career in law enforcement with an opportunity to gain a greater understanding of the profession, its responsibilities, and its demands. However, participation in the Reserve Unit must be based upon established qualifications and professional standards—not simply a desire to serve. The Virgin Islands must also consider the unique emergency-management environment in which our police officers operate.

Our Territory must be prepared to respond to hurricanes, natural disasters, major emergencies, mass-casualty incidents, infrastructure failures, and other circumstances that can

rapidly increase the demand for police services. A trained and organized reserve component could provide an additional pool of personnel that can be mobilized during extraordinary circumstances.

That capability has significant value for a Territory that must maintain public safety while managing the challenges associated with our geography, limited manpower, and the need to maintain essential services during emergencies. I want to emphasize an important point.

A Police Reserve Unit should supplement the Virgin Islands Police Department's sworn workforce; it should not be used as a substitute for adequate funding, recruitment, retention, training, equipment, and staffing of full-time police officers. Our full-time officers carry the primary responsibility for protecting the people of the Virgin Islands every day. They work around the clock. They respond to dangerous calls for service, conduct complex investigations, engage with our communities, and routinely place themselves in harm's way to protect others. The Reserve Unit should enhance that mission by providing additional capacity when properly trained, supervised, and deployed. If enacted, the Virgin Islands Police Department is prepared to work with the appropriate stakeholders to develop the policies, regulations, training standards, operational procedures, and administrative controls necessary to implement the Reserve Unit effectively. Our objective would be to establish a program that is professional, accountable, properly supervised, fiscally responsible, and operationally beneficial to the Department and the people we serve.

Funding must be identified to support the Reserve Unit, whether reserve officers receive compensation or serve as volunteers. Volunteer service still requires funding for screening, certification and ongoing training, uniforms, equipment, supervision, and applicable insurance or injury coverage. If reserve officers receive compensation, their pay must also be included in the program's budget. The Department must work with the Office of Management and Budget and other appropriate stakeholders to identify these costs and secure sufficient funding to establish and sustain the program.

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Senate, I again thank Senator Kenneth L. Gittens for sponsoring this legislation and for his continued attention to the public-safety needs of the Virgin Islands.

The Virgin Islands Police Department remains committed to its mission to serve and protect, uphold the Constitution, maintain public trust, and provide professional and accountable law-enforcement services to every community we serve.

For these reasons, on behalf of Police Commissioner Mario M. Brooks, I respectfully express our support for Bill No. 36-0318 and urge the Legislature to give this measure favorable consideration. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, we remain available to answer any questions you may have.