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VIPD Commander Speaks Out Against Revolving Door in Territorial Criminal Court System

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VIPD Criminal Investigation Bureau Commander, Lt. Naomi Joseph, on the scene of a weekend shooting on the Queen Mary Highway (Centerline Road) near the St. Croix Central High School in 2015. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

“We got people who got arrested this morning for [a] gun. Then he [gets] released this afternoon and the following morning he’ll be arrested for another gun. And then he got released again, and then we arrest him again!”

Lt. Naomi Joseph’s frustration was palpable as she spoke to Consortium journalists about what she called the “revolving door” of the territory’s criminal court system. The commander of the VIPD’s Criminal Investigation Bureau on St. Croix was exaggerating the timelines for effect – the

Superior Court's schedule does not always churn over quite that quickly – however the phenomenon she describes is all too real.

In April, a suspect in a robbery and assault was released pending trial despite a previous assault charge awaiting disposition by the courts. Jaekwon George's initial arrest in December 2022, for [assaulting his mother](#), included criminal contempt of court charges for violating a restraining order that she had taken out on her son. He was released ahead of trial on an unsecured bond of \$1000. In April, he was arrested again - this time, on [felony assault charges](#). The presiding judge in this new matter granted George pre-trial release following a \$10,000 cash payment, subsequently reduced to \$5000. Court records indicate that he was released into the 3rd-party custodial care of his mother - the woman he was accused of assaulting in December. Case records also show that the \$5000 was paid by his mother.

A man facing drug charges stemming from an arrest in January was out on bail when he was arrested again in March for similar offenses. Niah Henry was first arrested in "Operation Clean Sweep", [one of four](#) people nabbed by the VIPD in the American Yacht Harbor area of Red Hook on suspicion of selling drugs. Henry was bailed by his 3rd-party custodian, who according to court records paid \$2250, 10% of the total bail requirement of \$22,500. In March, Henry was arrested, again on suspicion of [selling marijuana and cocaine](#). On this occasion, he reportedly communicated his intention to continue to pursue his illicit trade, as according to him, that's how he earns a living to feed his children. In early April, over \$15,000 was paid on his behalf to secure his release ahead of future court proceedings.

"We had the guy, James - he broke into a gentleman's home. He attacked him, he attacked police," Commander Joseph recounted, referencing a matter involving Jelani James, who was arrested in April 2022 and initially charged with first-degree burglary, as well as aggravated assault and battery and destruction of property. "Police had to fight him, to get him locked up, handcuff him, restrain him. He went for advice of rights...they released him. He ain't pay no bail, nothing - just released him. And that night, [he shot his father in the neck](#)."

James, the son of former Public Works Commissioner Gustav James, now [faces charges](#) of attempted murder, first-degree assault, and possession of an illegal firearm. His father, who reportedly owned the gun that he was shot with, survived his injuries. In this case, bail was assessed in the sum of \$250,000 which had to be fully secured. However, both cases, which are tied together as siblings in the court system, seem to have gone dormant. The last update in the court's public access database came in February, when a judge required a status update from both defense counsel and prosecutors within 30 days. It is unclear whether the matters have since been disposed of by the courts.

Commander Joseph expressed frustration that at times, violent offenders are sentenced to probation which, when successfully completed, leaves the individual without a record of their crime. "We have a case where we had a video of them...shooting and injuring a young man. We had everybody's face there, we could see who they are. We arrested the individual, we found guns when we went and did the search warrant - found guns in the home. And they plead that down to just the possession of a firearm...37 11 c)...you get probation with that conviction...you understand?"

The senior police officer said that her colleagues were growing weary of re-arresting some of the same people again and again. "I have no control over individuals. Once I lock them up and they pass from me, that's the jail. When they get released from jail, that's the court - that's both defense and the Attorney General's Office."

Commander Joseph says she understands the purpose of assessing and granting bail for people suspected of criminal activity. “Bail is not punitive, bail is surety,” she said. However, she argues that judicial officers are not necessarily making proper consideration of the defendant in front of them in each case and what that person’s risk is to the community. “To hell with whether or not they have a tendency of repeating. If they’re a repeat offender there’s not even a consequence,” Lt. Commander Joseph lamented.

She believes that there must be more care taken by the court system to reduce the chances that likely violent threats to society are allowed to roam free while awaiting the dispensation of justice.

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