

Drones for More than Hurricanes: Senator Suggests New Law Enforcement Use

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In a recent Senate Committee hearing on Homeland Security, Justice and Public Safety, Senator Franklin Johnson suggested that the V.I. Police Department could use drones, or "unmanned aerial systems," for more than just hurricane preparedness and response. Specifically, he posited that drones could be employed to combat traffic violations, particularly those committed by motorcyclists without helmets or licenses.

This suggestion came after Sean Santos, police chief for the district of St. Croix, informed lawmakers that the VIPD's capabilities for hurricane preparedness and response had been significantly enhanced. For the first time, the department has the ability to deploy drones.

"These advanced drones play a pivotal role in conducting search and rescue missions, providing aerial analysis of various communities for damage assessment, and supporting escort efforts and crowd control points of distribution sites when the need arises," Chief Santos said.

When questioned about the exact applications of the drones, Chief Santos explained that they would be deployed for "observations as to how much damage we sustain" in the wake of hurricanes. The drones would also be instrumental in clearing roads and aiding in other search and rescue efforts.

While Chief Santos did not specifically address Senator Johnson's suggestion about using drones to tackle traffic infractions, he did state, "We plan on using it on different missions as well."

Mr. Johnson, undeterred, returned to the topic minutes later. "Guys speak about not being able to chase these folks with these motorcycles who don't have a helmet, that have no license or any stuff like that. And I think these drones can help you to have information for when you go to court," he said before moving on to other issues.