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Dire Conditions at St. John Police Station Prompt Urgent Calls for Action

Challenges in relocating operations: VIPD's struggle to secure temporary location hampers station upgrades

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The Leander Jurgen Command police station in St. John. By. VIPD

A concerned resident of St. John has sounded the alarm over conditions at the lone police station on the Island. Patrick Hanley spoke to lawmakers during a meeting of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security, Justice and Public Safety convened to discuss public safety concerns – the second in three months on the issue.

Mr. Hanley said that VIPD officers stationed at the Leander Jurgen Command police station are “working in deplorable conditions,” and drew a stark contrast between the Cleone H. Creque

Legislative Conference Room – “this beautiful Senate building” – and the police station right next door. “It’s a shame, and blatant disrespect for us to treat our protectors in such a disgraceful manner,” Mr. Hanley contended.

While VIPD Commissioner Ray Martinez agreed with Mr. Hanley that police officers deserve better conditions, he was unable to provide lawmakers with a definitive timelines for the rehabilitation or retrofitting of the Leander Jurgen Command Police Station. The Federal Emergency Management Agency has appropriated funds to upgrade the police station, Mr. Martinez noted, but before any work can begin, the VIPD must first secure a temporary location from which to operate.

Attempts to move to one property “fell through,” the commissioner explained, while another identified location had “issues with that property.” The issues, he explained, rested with the owners of the building and not the VIPD, Mr. Martinez said, but the end result is that “we are now back to square one.”

Senator Angel Bolques Jr., who had initiated the line of questioning relating to the police station on St. John, expressed concerns that upgrades to the physical plant, as well as equipment and additional personnel were “necessary for public safety response.”

Nonetheless, Mr. Martinez affirmed that efforts in that regard are continuing in earnest. The VIPD is in “communication with the owner of the old FirstBank area”, and is also relying on the support of Love City Strong, the commissioner stated. However, there is limited time within which to effectuate a move, with Mr. Martinez telling lawmakers that he could “ill afford to have them in that facility [during] the next hurricane season.”

Residents, though, have more concerns than just the possibility of further structural damage to the Leander Jurgen Command police station. According to Mr. Hanley, “the condition of this building creates a negative psychological effect on these officers.” He worried that having officers housed in the facility “adds to a deterioration of morale.”

Since the [November 2023 Senate hearing](#), St. Johnians reported increased police presence across the island, but nevertheless requested additional, specialized personnel to handle sensitive matters promptly. Detectives and a forensic officer were at the top of the list of additions. However, in the face of such critical human resource needs, Mr. Hanley worried that the state of the police station may be negatively affecting recruitment. The condition of the building, he maintained, is “discouraging for a young individual...who may be aspiring to become [a police] officer.”

Despite prevailing conditions, law enforcement officers on St. John continue to respond to a range of reports, including encounters with undocumented migrants, serious crimes, and robberies. The department is currently investigating approximately 60 open cases on the island from 2023.

However, much work still remains with respect to policing on the island. As St. John resident Myrtle Berry described to lawmakers, known “hotspots” for criminal activity exist, which in some places are “so bad that they hold up traffic at will during [the] evening.” She also accused the VIPD of allowing “individuals with connections” to at times “make a call that threatens or compromises officers’ job or authority.” Such acts, Ms. Berry says, “instill fear and seek to distort law enforcement efforts.” She called on the hierarchy of the VIPD to “stand with integrity” to ensure that their work is performed within the letter of the law.

The slow pace of investigations is also an issue, Ms. Berry said, noting that forensic evidence collected following a break-in at her business establishment in November of last year has yet to be processed. “Is this why crimes remain unsolved?” Ms. Berry questioned, decrying the “cocktail of

criminal opportunists plaguing the Virgin Islands.”

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