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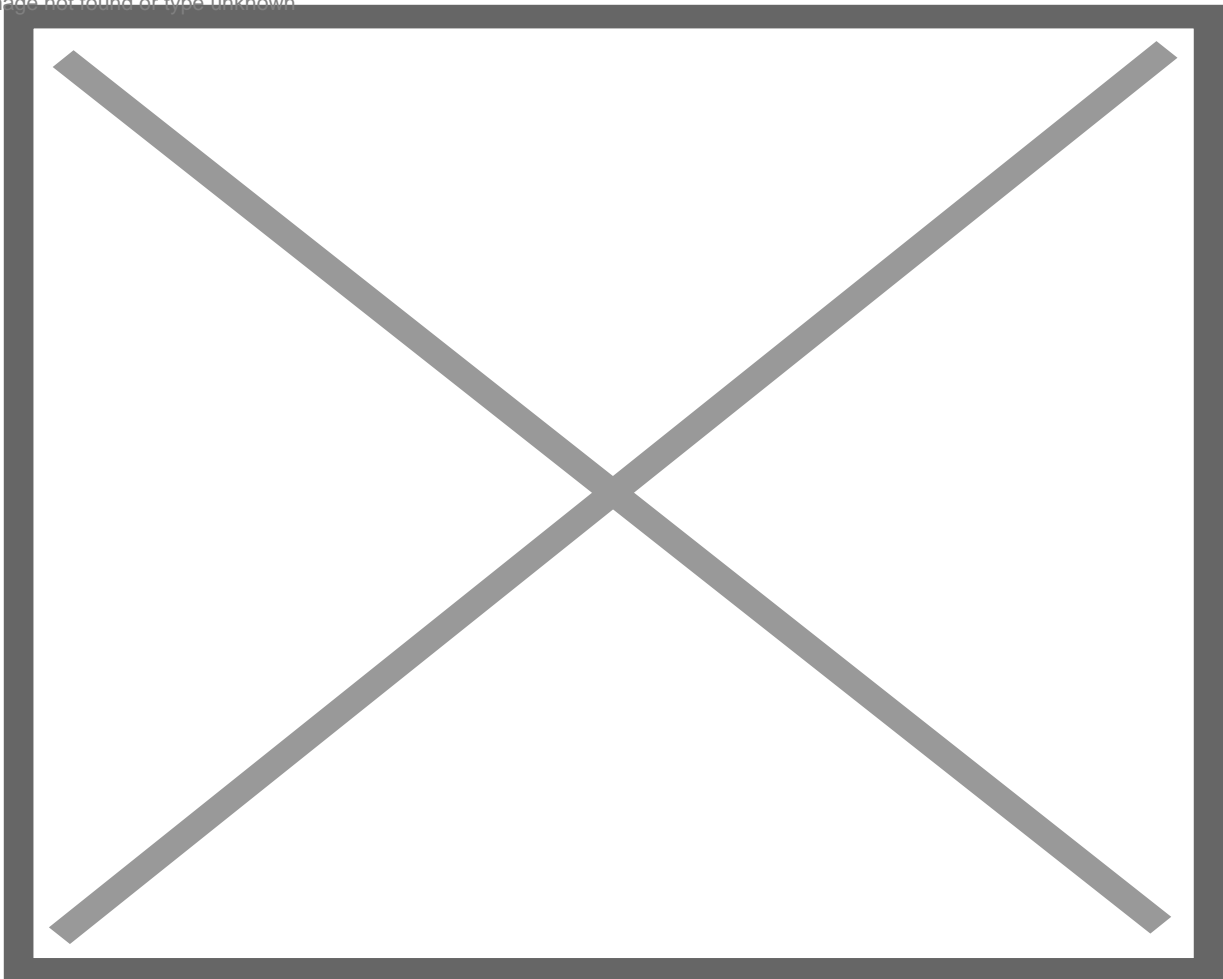
Bill Advances to Elevate Havensight Mall Security to Peace Officers

Lawmakers discuss benefits of granting peace officer status to Havensight Mall security personnel, with focus on enhancing public safety and boosting tourism

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Security officers employed at the Havensight Mall may soon be promoted to peace officers as Bill 35-0238 crossed its first legislative hurdle in the Committee on Homeland Security.

The bill, sponsored by Senator Milton Potter, seeks to confer peace officer status on qualified enforcement officers employed by the Government Employees' Retirement System. It is specific to GERS enforcement officers who work as security officers at the Havensight Mall.

Mr. Potter reminded his colleagues of the need for adequate security at the location that is popular among both locals and nearly 1 million tourists annually. “Over the past two years, we've witnessed a spate of serious crimes committed at that facility,” he lamented. In 2022, a [woman was shot](#) at a Havensight Mall jewelry store during a botched robbery. In October 2023, a man was fatally shot in the mall’s parking lot.

“Having peace officers on site will enhance the overall reputation of the mall as a safe and secure destination,” Mr. Potter argued, noting the potential to boost the local economy and attract more visitors. The new peace officers would be required to complete the requisite training from the V.I. Police Academy. They would subsequently be responsible for “[responding] to emergencies, [enforcing] laws and [maintaining] order within the Havensight Mall premises.”

Roy Moorehead, the mall’s chief security officer, put forward a case for the promotion of his security officers to peace officers. He told committee members that the request is a “strategic initiative to enhance the safety and security framework of Havensight Mall.” For Mr. Moorehead, “it is imperative that our security apparatus be robust, responsive, and equipped with the necessary authority.”

GERS believes that the presence of armed peace officers will “provide a profound feeling of safety.” Additionally, Mr. Moorehead noted that “it also aligns with our economic objectives by encouraging tourism and spending.” Mr. Moorehead assured lawmakers that the proposed legislation is a “collaborative security model” that respects the primary role of the VIPD.

Sidney Elskoe, assistant commissioner of police shared that the VIPD “supports all genuine attempts to create a safer society.”

Lawmakers generally supported the legislation and were buoyed by the fact that its enactment would come at little to no cost to central government. GERS plans to use the Havensight Mall’s budget to train four to six existing security officers and will cover their pay increases. Harkening back to an [earlier discussion in legislative committee](#), Senator Franklin Johnson reminded the GERS team of the full slate of responsibilities borne by peace officers, including responding to crime and other matters outside of the confines of the mall. Senator Novelle Francis, too, stressed that “peace officer status goes with them everywhere they go.”

Mr. Francis, who pledged his support for the bill, nevertheless warned GERS representatives that there was much to contemplate as they forged ahead. Insurance, retirement plans, firearm training, and costs associated with equipment, uniforms, and vehicles were among the considerations raised by the lawmaker. He suggested sending up to ten officers to the police academy as “a lot of individuals that go through the police academy could be washed out.”

Committee Chair Senator Kenneth Gittens was the only lawmaker to vote against the proposed legislation. “Why not channel those monies to the V.I. Police Department and fund the tourist-oriented policing initiative?” he asked. His next suggestion involved doing “what we’re supposed to do” and merging the V.I. Port Authority and the West Indian Company, subsequently “increasing the police budget for the Port Authority.”

After its successful passage on Tuesday, Bill 35-0238 will now be considered in the Committee on Rules and Judiciary.