

VIPD Has Paid Over \$18 Million in Overtime In 2024 Because of Poor Scheduling; A Deliberate 'Runaway Train,' Gittens Says

Officers' overtime earnings surge past six figures in 2024, with some topping \$200,000; Senator Gittens asserts willful mismanagement of scheduling is driving excessive payouts and diverting funds from critical needs

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Nelcia Charlemagne **July 30, 2024**

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VIPD officers responding to an incident in St. Thomas.

Like last year, the discussion surrounding the V.I. Police Department's FY2025 budget quickly shifted to concerns and considerations on [overtime payments](#). During Monday's hearing of the Senate Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance, lawmakers learned that VIPD has

paid out \$18 million in overtime as of July 11, 2024 – despite budgeting only \$8 million for that purpose. Funding that had been earmarked to fill much-needed vacancies in the Department was diverted to backstop overtime payments, committee members were told.

For the upcoming fiscal year, VIPD is requesting a general fund [appropriation of \\$74,360,767](#), slightly less than the \$75.5 million requested in the previous year. Acting Commissioner Mario Brooks, who has led the VIPD since the resignation of former Commissioner Ray Martinez [amid federal corruption investigations](#), said that the department expects to supplement that request with funding from several other sources: \$405,355 from the Peace Officer Training Fund, \$3,000,000 from the Tourism Ad Revolving Fund, and \$6,716,242 in federal funds. Money from the Tourism Ad Revolving Fund will be used to “support the VIPD’s tourism-oriented policing initiative and overtime during carnival activities,” he noted.

In a breakdown of the requested general fund appropriation, Mr. Brooks explained that the VIPD would need to pay more in rent – \$3,246,498 as opposed to the previous year’s \$1,407,291 – due to relocations necessary to undertake FEMA-funded retrofitting works at the department’s headquarters. The additional rental cost, Mr. Brooks said, is not covered by federal funds.

More substantially, \$40,662,452 will go towards paying salaries, while related fringe benefits will cost \$15,151,536. VIPD intends to spend \$4,486,641 on supplies and has earmarked \$11,941,822 for other services. The department has budgeted \$2,111,316 for utilities and \$7,000 for capital outlays. Mr. Brooks did not indicate how much was earmarked for overtime for FY2025.

Recruiting and retaining sufficient and qualified staff remains a challenge for VIPD. “A lot of people aren’t really interested in law enforcement,” said Dwayne Richards, VIPD’s director of human resources. Exit interviews often reveal that police officers leave the department after serving 2 to 3 decades, or for “better opportunities.” To compound the issue, the VIPD is aware that “the 12-hour shift is a killer, and not everybody wants to work 12 hours.”

VIPD says it has started to work at the foundational level to build interest through a cadet program at the St. Croix Education Complex, with plans to expand to St. Thomas/St. John. According to Mr. Brooks, “approval of our budget will enable us to continue delivering high-quality programs.”

Well aware of concerns over overtime spending, the VIPD representatives testified that they are exploring avenues to use federal funds to cover overtime, freeing up locally appropriated funds for their designated purposes. That suggestion raised the ire of Senator Kenneth Gittens. “Instead of addressing the root cause of this overtime, which is scheduling and the abuse that’s taking place, we continue to talk about utilizing federal grants for overtime,” he contended. “If we focus on the root cause of the overtime spending, we might take it someplace.”

“We can’t expect folks to work 12-hour shifts every day. We have to put a system in place,” offered Senator Donna Frett-Gregory. She encouraged the leadership of the police department to consider the health of officers. In response, Mr. Brooks admitted that “we know that this is where we are failing.” VIPD, in an effort to turn the tide, has identified appropriate scheduling software. “We’re waiting to close out the deal on that,” he said. The automated scheduling system will ensure officers are not scheduled for overtime after meeting the hourly threshold. Implementing the system will allow VIPD to “target those who are abusing the system.”

Mr. Gittens remained passionate about the overtime discussion throughout Monday’s meeting. “This is a total runaway train, and the abuse is being allowed to happen. Until management puts their feet down and stops this, it’s going to continue.” While a directive on overtime issued by

former Commissioner Martinez has not yet been made policy, lawmakers say they are concerned about the amount of overtime being afforded to officers whose base salary is already at or near six figures.

So far for 2024, "A lieutenant at a base pay of \$83,000 making in excess of \$136,000. Another lieutenant at \$95,000 base pay made \$121,000 plus. And another lieutenant at \$90,000 cracked over \$130,000. In the St. Croix district, a sergeant at \$82,000 base pay clocked over \$202,000 to date," Mr. Gittens disclosed. "An officer at \$71,000 clocked over \$163,000 in overtime to date, a sergeant at \$69,000 base pay clocked over \$150,000 in overtime. To date, another sergeant at \$72,000 cracking over \$129,000 to date. And a captain at \$100,000 clocked over \$118,000 in overtime to date," he continued.

"I'm seeing captains and lieutenants here that don't write a 1A report. None of them that I looked at wrote one traffic citation, not one - which is a revenue generator," Mr. Gittens accused.

Mr. Brooks acknowledged the problem and said that VIPD management was working with the Office of Management and Budget to get a handle on things. "We are looking at measures and, of course, enforcing the overtime directive that was put down," he assured a skeptical Gittens.