

Lawmakers Demand Stronger Action Against Dirt Bikes Amid VIPD Struggles

VIPD reveals pursuit policy limitations as lawmakers push for more aggressive measures to seize illegal vehicles

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The proliferation of dirt bikes, all-terrain vehicles, scooters, and other unlicensed vehicles along main roads in the USVI is creating a major challenge for the V.I. Police Department. “Our efforts have been challenging, to say the least,” admitted Assistant Commissioner Sidney Elskoe during Tuesday’s meeting of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security, Justice, and Public Safety.

Though many Virgin Islanders operate these vehicles on public roadways, the inability for them to be licensed makes that decision illegal. “Many of these vehicles, particularly dirt bikes, cannot be licensed because they are physically unable to have a license plate or tail light affixed to their rear,” explained Mr. Elskoe. But while issuing a citation may seem like a simple solution, the

VIPD says they are facing a much more serious hurdle.

“The Achilles heel hampering our efforts [is] the Virgin Islands Police Department’s operational policy [that] prevents the pursuit of dirt bikes and motorcycles,” revealed Mr. Elskoe. When motorcyclists reach traffic stops, they often leave at “a high rate of speed, often fast enough in which the operator risks injury or death.” Therefore, the aforementioned policy was implemented to “prevent officers from executing excessive risk versus the reward of issuing a citation.”

Members of the community, including several lawmakers, continue to lodge complaints not just over “the irresponsible manner in which they operate, but also the excessive noise they create,” Mr. Elskoe said. Generally, these vehicles are uninsured. But while the VIPD assistant commissioner shared that police chiefs in both districts have “led the charge to address the matter,” lawmakers contended that more can be done.?

“I’m not seeing the aggressive enforcement,” declared Senator Kenneth Gittens. “I am fully aware of your policy that you spoke about of not pursuing motorcycles, but there are ways to address this ...We could identify them...They must stop somewhere.” He wondered whether VIPD had any success in seizing any of these illegally operating vehicles. The response would prove somewhat bewildering.?

While VIPD has had some successes in confiscating dirt bikes and other unlicensed vehicles, “there was no way to prevent the bikes from going back to the owner,” Mr. Elskoe disclosed. “If the person pays a citation, the property is theirs.” He promised Mr. Gittens that VIPD ensures vehicles like dirt bikes and the like are towed back to the private property of the owner, where they can then be ridden.?

The conversation offered an opportunity for Mr. Gittens to discuss his plans to introduce legislation that would increase traffic citations and establish a police impound lot. “These types of excuses, I don’t want to have anymore.”?

Meanwhile, Senator Franklin Johnson encouraged the use of resources currently available to the VIPD. “You’re telling me that you can’t set up your drone to video these guys riding and then come and confiscate?” he asked. Mr. Elskoe confirmed to Mr. Johnson that VIPD is aware of popular meeting locations for riders of dirt bikes, ATVs, scooters, and other motorized vehicles operating on public roads without licenses.?

“We know they’re going to fuel up, so we will set surveillance on a particular gas station, knowing they’re going to show up,” explained Mr. Elskoe, but reminded lawmakers that the confiscation process was “not sustainable.” “Once they pay the citation, they would come get the bikes, and then it would be back on the road.”