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DOH Prioritizes Support and Prevention After Recent Suspected Suicides on St. Croix; Briefing Scheduled for Today

VIPD hosts briefing today with DOH and government agencies on community measures, clarifies location change and closed press status, suicide prevention guidance to be shared

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ST. CROIX — Following a tragic series of events between Friday and Saturday that saw three suspected suicides on St. Croix, the V.I. Department of Health has commenced outreach efforts to support the affected families. These incidents, which include the death of VIPD Officer Janlee Cruz, have also prompted Government House and local agencies to address the community on

their mental health response strategies.

The V.I. Police Department issued three statements on Sunday detailing each incident, while Government House released a tribute to Officer Cruz, who served with the VIPD's Executive Security Unit. Cruz was discovered unresponsive in his vehicle at Salt River Marina on Saturday afternoon with a gunshot wound, and his death is under investigation as a suspected suicide. Government House highlighted Cruz's dedication, calling him a "dedicated protector" whose positive influence was deeply valued, and extended condolences to his family.

The VIPD will host a briefing today, where representatives from VIPD, the Department of Health (DOH), and additional government agencies will discuss current efforts and provide updates on measures being taken to address pressing community concerns. VIPD Director of Communications Glen Dratte clarified that due to a scheduling conflict with the Bryan administration's regular Monday briefings, the event will not be held at Government House. Additionally, the briefing will not be open to the press. DOH Deputy Commissioner for Behavioral Health, Renan Steele, will provide suicide prevention guidance as part of the agenda.

The other two cases involved male residents of St. Croix. According to the VIPD, on Saturday afternoon, one man was found unresponsive on his apartment floor at St. Croix Condominiums by his son, who alerted authorities. Jason May, general manager of St. Croix Condominiums, later clarified that the incident took place at a residence located along the road leading back to St. Croix Condominiums.

Despite rapid response efforts, the man was declared dead at the scene. In another incident on Friday, police responded to a wellness check request at a residence in Sweet Lime Village, where they found a male resident deceased upon arrival.

All three deaths remain under active investigation, with autopsies pending to confirm the causes. Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion told the Consortium on Sunday that DOH has been coordinating with VIPD Commissioner Mario Brooks and V.I. Fire and EMS Director Antonio Stevens, confirming that the DOH's Behavioral Health Unit has activated to provide support to those impacted. Ms. Encarnacion also announced plans to expedite a suicide prevention campaign to raise mental health awareness in the community. She reiterated DOH's commitment to public outreach and support, saying, "We're always putting information out."

In October, recognized as Suicide Prevention Month, the Department of Health conducted various outreach efforts to promote awareness. Commissioner Encarnacion stated that these initiatives will continue in light of recent events. She emphasized the need for accessible mental health resources, underscoring a commitment to preventive measures and community training aimed at addressing these challenges effectively.