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37 Federal Officers Commissioned as VI Peace Officers, Bolstering Collaboration and Community Sensitivity

37 federal officers from the FBI, DEA, and U.S. Marshals Service are now commissioned as V.I. Peace Officers, following training on local history and cultural sensitivity. The effort strengthens law enforcement and builds community trust

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Top row, left to right: U.S. Attorney for the U.S. Virgin Islands Delia Smith, V.I. Attorney General Gordon Rhea. Bottom row, left to right: Assistant Police Commissioner Sidney Elskoe, UVI Professor Olasee Davis. By. V.I. DOJ

The V.I. Department of Justice has announced that it recently commissioned 37 federal law enforcement officers as Virgin Islands Peace Officers, marking a significant enhancement in federal and local law enforcement collaboration.

Attorney General Gordon C. Rhea announced the commissioning on Tuesday, noting that each officer completed specialized training on Virgin Islands history and cultural sensitivities, conducted by Professor Olasee Davis from the University of the Virgin Islands.

This new wave of peace officers includes personnel from several key federal agencies: the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), U.S. Marshals Service (USMS), and U.S. Homeland Security Investigations (HSI). Specifically, the group is composed of two FBI agents, five DEA agents, twelve HSI agents, ten CBP officers, and eight U.S. Marshals.

According to the V.I. DOJ, the authority to commission federal law enforcement officers as Virgin Islands Peace Officers was established under Title 23, Virgin Islands Code, Section 3, passed by the Virgin Islands Legislature in September 2012. This legislation authorizes the V.I. Police Department commissioner to grant federal officers the power to act as local peace officers, with the ability to enforce Virgin Islands law, including making arrests when necessary.

Mr. Rhea emphasized the value of this commissioning for both safety and community relations. "This commissioning marks an important step in strengthening the collaboration between federal and local law enforcement," he explained. "It ensures that all officers are equipped to enforce the law while honoring the unique cultural sensitivities of the Virgin Islands."

United States Attorney Delia Smith added, "By granting federal officers the authority to serve as Virgin Islands Peace Officers, we are enhancing our law enforcement capacity and improving our ability to address criminal activity across jurisdictions."

The V.I. DOJH said a Memorandum of Understanding between the Virgin Islands Department of Justice, the U.S. Attorney's Office, and the VIPD outlines protocols for the issuance and revocation of commissions. Peace Officers are empowered to use reasonable force in defending themselves or others from harm and may apprehend fleeing felons under conditions that pose a risk to public safety.

Professor Olasee Davis's training program was designed to deepen the officers' understanding of the Virgin Islands' rich history and cultural nuances, equipping them to interact with the local community respectfully and effectively. A noted historian and environmental activist, Professor Davis stressed the significance of cultural awareness in law enforcement, fostering trust, and enhancing relationships within the community.

The opening remarks for the commissioning were delivered by Attorney General Rhea and VIPD Assistant Commissioner Sidney Elskoe, who praised the officers for their commitment to both the Virgin Islands and federal responsibilities. Through this partnership, federal and local law enforcement agencies aim to create a safer environment for residents, demonstrating a joint dedication to both justice and the unique heritage of the Virgin Islands.