

Police Commissioner Vows to Tackle Loitering Across the Virgin Islands

Mario Brooks outlines plans to enforce loitering laws more effectively, emphasizing officer education and stricter measures to address public safety risks highlighted by outgoing Senator Donna Frett-Gregory

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As the new year draws near, outgoing Senator Donna Frett-Gregory urged the new leadership of the V.I. Police Department to clamp down on the territory’s loitering problem, lamenting the apparent lack of enforcement.

When Commissioner Mario Brooks appeared before the Committee on Rules and Judiciary for confirmation [earlier this month](#), Ms. Frett-Gregory pointedly asked “how do you plan to address the challenges that we have with loitering?”

A pragmatic Mr. Brooks replied that the VIPD has already identified loitering as an issue requiring immediate attention. “The chiefs and I have had several discussions about that,” he shared with lawmakers. “We’re going to revisit that along the lines of educating our personnel to ensure that they understand exactly what the loitering law brings,” explained Mr. Brooks. He agreed with Ms. Frett-Gregory that loitering is of paramount concern, adding that as a police officer, he himself has had to remove individuals from certain areas, particularly in the St. Thomas district.

Key to eradicating loitering is ensuring police officers are aware of what it looks like, and what the repercussions are, Mr. Brooks said. He added that he would ensure “that they are, in fact, enforcing this specific law because loitering is major in the territory.”

Earlier this year, the VIPD [promised to crack down on loitering](#), including through enforcement campaigns, to enhance public safety. At the time, then-commissioner Ray Martinez noted that “it is imperative that strict enforcement measures are applied to uphold public safety, mitigate potential risks and ensure compliance with the legislation.

“That is a very significant piece of legislation that helps to prevent a lot of what we’re seeing occurring with people being gunned down in the streets here in the Virgin Islands,” added Ms. Frett-Gregory during the Senate hearing on December 12. She referenced Anna’s Retreat as an area of specific concern. “There is a police station in that area, but that loitering continues. I spoke to the former commissioner about that issue, and it has not been addressed,” she bemoaned.

“I don’t know what the issue is – whether we’re afraid to address it – but it needs to be addressed,” the St. Thomas senator told Mr. Brooks. “People need to be comfortable in their homes, and it’s unfortunate when you have a police command center that’s right there and it’s not being addressed.”

According to local law, loitering is defined as “being dilatory, lingering, delaying, or wandering about in a public place in a manner that engages in prohibited activities such as gambling, prowling around schools, engaging in prostitution, drug use or possession, unlawfully consuming alcohol, and other disruptive or criminal behaviors.”

Loitering is classified as a misdemeanor, punishable by a fine of up to \$5,000 or imprisonment for up to one year, or both.