

Bryan Says V.I. Gun Policy Has "Totally Failed," Calls for Easier Licensing and Legal Gun Ranges

The governor argues that restrictive gun laws drive more residents to obtain illegal firearms and proposes a new system that simplifies legal gun ownership while ensuring registration and ballistic tracking.

Government / **Published On January 30, 2025 05:27 AM /**

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“I think the Virgin Islands gun policy has totally failed,” said Governor Albert Bryan Jr., speaking during Wednesday's exclusive interview with the Consortium.

He was responding to a question about how the territory could possibly stem the influx of unlicensed, unregistered firearms into the territory.

“What happens is – when you tell somebody no, the temptation is more,” Governor Bryan argued, referring to the territory's strict gun ownership regulations. “The states with the toughest gun laws

get the highest homicide rates,” he declared.

“I think we should move to a place where we open gun ranges that are legal and we make it easier for people to license and carry firearms,” Governor Bryan stated. He argued that the percentage of Virgin Islanders who carry unregistered weapons for reasons of ill-intent is very small, while the majority of residents carry firearms because “they're trying to protect themselves, or feel protected.”

However, many people “can't get a legal gun, because the system [requires so much] rigmarole in order to get these legal guns,” Governor Bryan said. “Then you could only get a rifle, you got to leave it home.” He envisioned “a system that wasn't so resistant, where you could go to a range, you take a gun class, you get a ticket to purchase a firearm, you get it registered and licensed, we have the ballistics on it, then it wouldn't have any need for all these illegal guns coming into the territory, right?”

Governor Bryan says the current restrictive regime only serves to criminalize many young Virgin Islanders seeking to exercise their second amendment rights. He told a story about a man with no previous criminal record, who was jailed for 15 years without parole after pleading guilty to gun and ammunition charges. “They told him he'd probably get three years for the possession...where is the justice in that?” Governor Bryan asked. “We setting up our young people to fail.”

Acknowledging that law enforcement officials have been doing an excellent job of finding and confiscating illicit weapons, Governor Bryan nevertheless believes that a different approach is needed. “What we are doing is not working.”