

Morale and Manpower Issues Grip VIPD as Officers Call Out Sick in St. Thomas-St. John

As a wave of absences strains the V.I. Police Department in the St. Thomas-St. John District, union leadership confirms that officers are fatigued, underpaid, and frustrated by stalled contract negotiations and lack of support during manpower shortages.

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For what appears to be the second day in a row, the V.I. Police Department appears to be grappling with a manpower shortage in the St. Thomas-St. John District.

President of the Police Benevolent Association in St. Thomas Joel Connor, was quick to dispel rumors of an official job action taking place. He did confirm, however, that there was a not-insignificant number of officers absent from work. “Some officers have called in sick, I know

some officers are off,” he told the Consortium. “I know there are officers on military leave.”

Despite there not being a union-sanctioned withdrawal of labor, Mr. Connor did not hesitate to say that morale among junior ranks is low. “I know the officers [are] overworked, they're burned out,” he disclosed. “I know that some of the issues that they are facing are an expired contract from 2022.”

The expiration of the contract meant the end of incremental increases, a source of frustration among officers whose starting salary is \$40,000 per year. “We're making \$19 an hour, and that's not acceptable,” Mr. Connors declared.

Amidst the raft of absences currently being experienced among the junior ranks, more senior police are reportedly stepping into the breach. “I understand from this morning, supervisors are covering the roads,” Mr. Connors shared. He pointed to another grievance among officers. “One of the issues that we've been having is the supervisors don't assist the officers when they're short,” he said. “So now...according to the officers, they're fed up and overworked, working 16-hour shifts and 18-hour shifts. They're fed up and they're just tired, and some of them are really out sick.”

Mr. Connor disclosed that he recently met with Governor Albert Bryan Jr.—a meeting he described as fruitful—during which the governor acknowledged that officers are owed their step increases. A new draft collective bargaining agreement is currently in progress, Mr. Connor said. “Conversations have been had; we're just waiting for something in writing.”

Meanwhile, the union has signaled to its members that they should report for duty. “We do not condone any sick-out and we ask them to go back to work, hoping that the government upholds the standard and agrees to give them the increase that they're asking for,” Mr. Connor said.

When asked about the impact of the absences, VIPD Communications Director Glen Dratte stated, “On Sunday, June 15th, 2025, several officers reported sick, leading to a notable workforce shortage that extended into the afternoon of Monday, June 16th. This unexpected absence of personnel raised concerns about maintaining adequate public safety and response capabilities.

“In response to this situation, the Virgin Islands Police Department (VIPD) activated its established protocols to mitigate the impact on community safety. Resources were strategically diverted from other divisions, and available officers were reassigned to critical duties to ensure that essential services remained operational. The department worked diligently to maintain a visible presence in the community and to reassure residents that their safety and security continued to be a top priority despite the staffing challenges.”