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## U.S. DOJ Sues VIPD, Alleging Unconstitutional Delays and Barriers in Firearms Licensing

**The U.S. Dept. of Justice alleges the V.I. Police Department imposes unlawful delays, unconstitutional conditions, and a prohibited “proper cause” standard in firearms permitting, violating Supreme Court precedent and residents’ Second Amendment rights.**

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The U.S. Department of Justice has filed a civil lawsuit against the V.I. Police Department, alleging that its firearms permitting system violates the Second Amendment by imposing unreasonable delays, unlawful conditions, and enforcement of a “proper cause” standard that the U.S. Supreme Court has already struck down.

The lawsuit, announced Tuesday by U.S. Attorney Adam F. Sleeper for the District of the Virgin Islands, contends that VIPD’s current practices effectively deny law-abiding residents their constitutional right to keep and bear arms by obstructing the permitting process through prolonged delays and burdensome requirements.

According to the complaint, numerous applicants have reported that VIPD takes an unreasonable amount of time to decide gun permit applications while imposing conditions that are not constitutionally permissible. Among the practices cited are requirements that applicants install bolted-in gun safes before a permit is issued and the continuation of a “proper cause” requirement that closely mirrors a New York law invalidated by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2022.

“This Civil Rights Division will protect the Second Amendment rights of law-abiding citizens,” said Assistant Attorney General Harmeet K. Dhillon of the Department of Justice’s Civil Rights Division. “The newly-established Second Amendment Section filed this lawsuit to bring the Virgin Islands Police Department back into legal compliance by ensuring that applicants receive timely decisions without unconstitutional obstruction.”

U.S. Attorney Sleeper echoed those concerns, stating that existing firearms licensing laws and practices in the territory are incompatible with constitutional standards.

“The territory’s firearms licensing laws and practices are inconsistent with the Second Amendment,” Sleeper said. “This lawsuit seeks to uphold the rights of law-abiding citizens to bear arms in the U.S. Virgin Islands.”

The complaint points directly to the Supreme Court’s decision in *New York State Rifle & Pistol Association, Inc. v. Bruen*, which struck down “proper cause” requirements that allowed law enforcement agencies to deny permits unless applicants demonstrated a special need. That ruling, the DOJ emphasized, is binding nationwide, including in the Virgin Islands.

Despite that precedent, the DOJ alleges that the Virgin Islands continues to maintain and enforce a nearly identical standard. The lawsuit also asserts that residents have complained of unconstitutional and unreasonable home searches conducted as part of the permitting process — a practice the Supreme Court has previously characterized as abusive within firearms licensing schemes.

The case has been filed in the U.S. District Court of the Virgin Islands. As part of its enforcement effort, the Department of Justice is inviting current and prospective gun owners who believe their applications have been subjected to unconstitutional delays or practices to submit complaints directly to the Civil Rights Division’s Second Amendment Section.

The lawsuit represents one of the first actions brought by the U.S. Justice Department’s newly established Second Amendment Section and signals increased federal scrutiny of firearms permitting systems that conflict with Supreme Court precedent.