

PBA Says Officers Earning About \$20 an Hour Can't Keep Roads Safe Without Stronger Laws and Pay

The police union warns that underpaid and overworked officers face strained morale, recruitment, & effectiveness, with some relying on overtime, second jobs, or unstable living conditions, arguing that safer roads require tougher laws & fair compensation.

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Scene of the deadly accident on the Donoe Bypass Road in St. Thomas in 2025.

Amid growing concern over traffic fatalities in the Virgin Islands, the Policemen's Benevolent Association is calling for sweeping legislative action, increased enforcement resources, and meaningful pay reform for law enforcement officers, arguing that public safety cannot be improved through awareness campaigns alone.

In an official statement released this week, the PBA acknowledged and welcomed a recent public statement by Avery L. Lewis addressing what the union described as “tragic and preventable traffic fatalities” that have deeply affected the community. The association said it joins in extending condolences to the families impacted, noting that “every life lost on our roadways is one too many.”

While recognizing the importance of public appeals encouraging motorists to slow down and obey traffic laws, the PBA said such messages are no longer sufficient given the scale of reckless driving and excessive speeding occurring across the territory.

“While public appeals urging drivers to slow down and obey traffic laws are necessary, they are no longer enough,” the statement said. “The level of reckless driving and excessive speeding occurring on our roadways requires decisive legislative action, not reminders alone.”

As the union representing officers tasked with enforcing traffic laws and protecting lives, the PBA urged the Legislature to strengthen statutes related to speeding and reckless driving, stressing that “extreme speed is not an accident it is a conscious decision that takes lives.”

The association called on senators to take immediate action, including enacting stronger penalties for reckless driving and excessive speeding, implementing revocation or long-term suspension of driving privileges for egregious violations, establishing mandatory jail time for conduct that endangers the public, and treating extreme speeding “as the deadly behavior it is, not a minor infraction.”

The PBA also warned that enforcement efforts cannot succeed without sufficient legislative support and investment in the Virgin Islands Police Department. According to the union, lawmakers must ensure the department is properly funded and equipped to enforce laws “effectively and fairly.”

This support, the statement said, must include adequate staffing levels, properly maintained patrol vehicles, modern traffic enforcement tools, and safe and professional working conditions for officers.

“Officers cannot be expected to police chaos without the laws, resources, and backing necessary to do so,” the statement read. “Public safety demands more than words it demands accountability and investment.”

Beyond road safety, the PBA used the statement to highlight what it described as an economic crisis facing law enforcement officers in the territory. The union said many officers earn the equivalent of approximately \$20 per hour while facing rising costs for housing, utilities, food, and transportation.

“Officers are being forced into an impossible position protecting the public by day while worrying about securing safe and adequate housing for their families at night,” the statement said.

The PBA stated that the issue extends beyond labor negotiations and directly affects public safety. “This is not simply a labor issue. This is a public safety issue,” the statement declared.

According to the union, financial strain among officers affects morale, retention, recruitment, and effectiveness, forcing some to rely on excessive overtime, second jobs, or unstable living conditions to survive. “No one entrusted with public safety should be living on the edge of economic insecurity,” the statement said.

To address these challenges, the PBA called on the Legislature to implement meaningful pay increases and cost-of-living adjustments, align law enforcement compensation with the true cost of living in the Virgin Islands, and recognize that “effective enforcement, safer roads, and community trust are impossible without fair pay.”

“You cannot demand stronger enforcement, safer roadways, and accountability from officers while ignoring the financial realities they face,” the statement said. “If officers are expected to work in peace and protect the public with focus and professionalism, then they must be paid a wage that allows them to live with dignity.”

The statement concluded by reaffirming the union’s central message: “Every life lost on our roads matters. Every officer protecting those roads matters.”

“If we are serious about saving lives, we must be serious about laws, consequences, funding, and fair compensation,” the PBA said.