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# Gun Violence Escalates in Hospital Ground with Third Shooting Death This Week; Police on Friday Make a Major Show of Force on St. Thomas

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Robert Moore **April 10, 2020**

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**Virgin Islands Police make a show of force with roadblocks on St. Thomas Friday night.**  
By. ROBERT MOORE, VI CONSORTIUM

ST. THOMAS — A 35-year-old man was found shot to death on the roadside in Hospital Ground Friday morning, the latest fatality in a wave of gun violence sweeping through the St. Thomas community.

Police identified the victim as Junior Akimo Freeman. He is the third person killed by gun violence in Hospital Ground since Wednesday, and the fifth shooting victim, according to the Virgin Islands Police Department. Two men were shot and killed in separate incidents early

Wednesday. A woman who was walking in the area of Goat Street was struck twice by bullets fired by two masked men running through the Hospital Ground area firing handguns, police said.

No arrests have been made in any of the shootings, though some residents say a long-running drug war involving known gang members was behind the recent violence. V.I. Police Commissioner Trevor Velinor and St. Thomas-St. John District Police Chief Ludrick Thomas took heat Friday afternoon from Hospital Ground residents during the Peter Ottley radio program on WSTA-1340FM.

"I've lived here 50 years," one caller said. "Why do you all wait until something happens to police those areas? This should not have happened. You (VIPD) could have put a stop to this from the beginning."

Mr. Velinor said the police department's Special Operations unit was blanketing Hospital Ground and surrounding areas to quell the bloody rise in shootings. "We're going to be very aggressive in dealing with those who are out on the streets," he said.



Virgin Islands Police make show of force with roadblocks on St Thomas Friday night. (Robert Moore, VI Consortium)

Another caller from Hospital Ground, clearly distraught by the outbreak of shootings, wasn't buying it. "I have young children in my home. ... To be constantly under siege from these bullets

is really overbearing. We don't see any police around here. Maybe you all can snow people and fool people, but you can't fool me. The police are not here. Stop fooling the people into believing that you are going to do something about it and actually do something," she said.

Early Friday police roadblocks were set up in Hospital Ground, and throughout the day, officers in teams of two manned several corners. By Friday evening a massive show of police force snarled traffic along Raphune Hill, although it is unclear whether the police presence was related to the Hospital Ground shootings or a display of a more aggressive COVID-19 response by the government.

Half a dozen police cruisers lined the road as officers stopped each car descending the hill to ask where motorists were headed. Officers in military fatigues reminded drivers that a stay-at-home order was in place. "Go home, stay home," police warned. At least two vehicles headed toward Havensight appear to have been instructed to turn around and head back up Raphune Hill. "If you have no reason to be out, there is an order from the governor. Stay home," Mr. Velinor said.

In response to a question from one caller, Mr. Velinor said the department may dispatch officers from St. Croix to St. Thomas to continue to crackdown on the violence. A concern expressed by one radio caller was that she believed some police officers may be reluctant to target suspects they may know personally or be related to.

Mr. Velinor said he would seek out any officers who violate the public trust by not pursuing suspects because of a prior association.

While the Hospital Ground murders have gone unsolved, police on Thursday busted a 32-year-old man armed with illegal assault rifles and two semi-automatic handguns. Kenan Thomas was charged with possession of an illegal firearm, possession of ammunition and possession of a gun within 1000 feet of a public park. He was remanded to the Bureau of Corrections after failing to make bail of \$25,000.

Police ask that anyone having information regarding any of the Hospital Ground shootings to call 911, the Criminal Investigation Bureau at (340) 774-2211 extension 5606, or Crime Stoppers USVI at (800) 222-TIPS.

Correction: April 11, 2020

A previous version of this story, because of a text error, said the incident occurred on Saturday morning when it actually occurred on Friday. The story has been updated to include the correct information.