

Bryan Reveals Officer Charles Was Blocked and Ambushed Leaving Home; Several Arrests Made as Governor Calls for Death Penalty

Governor Albert Bryan Jr. said Officer Eustace Charles was blocked and ambushed by several individuals while leaving home for duty, as police cameras tracked the vehicles used, leading to arrests, firearm seizures and search warrants across St. Croix.

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Officer Eustace Charles, a VIPD Executive Security Unit member assigned to Lt. Gov. Tregenza Roach, was fatally ambushed as he left his St. Croix home for duty Sunday morning.

ST. CROIX — Officer Eustace Charles was blocked by several individuals and ambushed as he left his home early Sunday morning to report for duty as part of Lt. Gov. Tregenza Roach's security detail, Gov. Albert Bryan Jr. revealed Sunday afternoon, providing the first detailed account of the circumstances surrounding [the officer's killing](#).

Mr. Bryan said cameras installed as part of the V.I. Police Department's surveillance system enabled investigators to quickly identify the vehicles used in the attack and track them across St. Croix. He said several arrests had since been made, multiple firearms were confiscated and search warrants were executed.

"At this point, several arrests have been made. We call them persons of interest. Several firearms were confiscated, and search warrants were executed," the governor said during the live address.

Mr. Bryan did not disclose the number of people taken into custody, identify them or state whether criminal charges had been filed. He also did not provide descriptions of the vehicles, firearms or locations searched, citing the active investigation.

The governor said the attack occurred at approximately 5 a.m. to 5:30 a.m. as Mr. Charles was leaving home to begin his assignment protecting the lieutenant governor. The officer's vehicle was blocked before several individuals opened fire, according to Governor Bryan.

Members of Officer Charles's family heard the gunfire and went to him, the governor said. Mr. Charles was still breathing when they reached him but later succumbed to his injuries.

The disclosure provided additional context to VIPD's earlier account. Police previously said the 911 Emergency Call Center received a report of shots fired in Williams Delight at approximately 5:50 a.m. Responding officers found the 51-year-old officer unresponsive inside a vehicle with multiple gunshot wounds, and Emergency Medical Technicians determined that he had no vital signs.

The earlier police release said the person responsible remained at large. The governor's announcement of several arrests, seized firearms and executed search warrants represented a significant development in the investigation.

Federal Agencies Join Investigation

The governor said the VIPD is working with the FBI, Drug Enforcement Administration, Homeland Security, the U.S. Attorney's Office and the V.I. Attorney General's Office to pursue those responsible.

"We want the full extent of the law, and we have cooperating federal officials from the FBI, the DEA, Homeland Security, all working in concert with the U.S. Attorney's Office and the AG's office, so that we prosecute these people to the full extent," he said.

The governor then called for the most severe punishment available. "Nothing less than the death penalty is acceptable in this case," Mr. Bryan said.

Federal law permits capital punishment for certain federal offenses under the Federal Death Penalty Act, which is codified at 18 U.S.C. Sections 3591 through 3599. The District Court of the Virgin Islands has the jurisdiction of a United States district court, allowing qualifying federal criminal cases to be prosecuted in the territory.

However, a death sentence would not automatically be available solely because the victim was a local law-enforcement officer. Federal prosecutors would first have to establish that the facts support a death-eligible federal charge. The Department of Justice's capital-case procedures also require an individualized review, and the U.S. attorney general makes the final decision on whether federal prosecutors may seek the death penalty.

Mr. Bryan said he would not disclose additional investigative information but expected a thorough and relentless inquiry that would bring those responsible to justice quickly.

"This heinous act of violence took the life of a valued public servant and shook all our government and law enforcement families," he said.

Officer Was Assigned to Roach's Security Detail

Officer Charles was a member of VIPD's Executive Security Unit and served as the lieutenant governor's personal security detail on St. Croix. Governor Bryan said the officer, known to colleagues as "Pops," was considered part of both the Government House and law-enforcement families.

The governor described him as a dependable colleague, a gentleman and a dedicated public servant who took pride in helping and protecting others. Although he was a man of few words, Charles would immediately assist anyone he saw in need and responded to requests for help with a smile, Mr. Bryan said.

He said the officer's death was being felt throughout VIPD, the Executive Security Unit, the Office of the Governor and the Office of the Lieutenant Governor.

Bryan had earlier described Charles's death as a devastating loss and said those who worked with him knew him as a professional and committed public servant.

The governor said he had remained in close contact with Mr. Roach since learning of the killing early Sunday. He described the lieutenant governor as devastated by the death of an officer who had worked so closely with him.

Mr. Bryan said he initially found it difficult to connect the kind-hearted and friendly officer he knew with an ambush of such violence.

At the time of the address, Lt. Governor Roach and Sen. Novelle Francis Jr. were visiting Mr. Charles's family to offer condolences and support, according to the governor.

The Roach-Francis campaign had earlier postponed its scheduled Sunday motorcade on St. Croix, saying the decision was made out of respect for Officer Charles and to allow VIPD to devote its personnel and resources to the investigation.

The administration was also coordinating grief counseling and other assistance for employees of Government House, the Office of the Lieutenant Governor and others who worked closely with Mr. Charles.

"To Officer Charles' family, please know that you are not grieving alone," Mr. Bryan said.

He said the government, VIPD and the wider Virgin Islands community would continue supporting the officer's relatives, colleagues and fellow officers through the days ahead.

The governor said Officer Charles would be remembered for his professionalism, kindness, commitment to service, smile and the pride he took in protecting others, including the governor's family.

Bryan Calls for Community Cooperation

The governor used much of the address to speak about what he described as a troubling increase in gun violence during recent weeks.

Addressing residents of St. Croix, St. Thomas, St. John and Water Island, Mr. Bryan said gunfire appeared to have become the response to personal disputes, leaving families grieving and children, neighbors, friends and co-workers traumatized.

He stressed that the violence was being committed by a relatively small number of people and should not be allowed to define the wider Virgin Islands community.

The overwhelming majority of Virgin Islanders, he said, are law-abiding residents who want to work, support their families and live in safe and peaceful communities.

Mr. Bryan said VIPD officers were working daily to identify people responsible for violent crimes, remove illegal firearms and prevent further bloodshed. However, identifying suspected perpetrators was not enough, he said, because investigators must obtain evidence that can be used to prove criminal cases in court.

Law enforcement cannot accomplish that without public cooperation, the governor said.

He described public safety as a shared responsibility involving law enforcement, government, families, churches, schools, businesses and residents. He encouraged people with information about criminal activity or illegal firearms to contact law enforcement, a police tips line or Crime Stoppers V.I.

The governor said nearly every Virgin Islander had been affected by the killing of a relative, friend, colleague or acquaintance. Someone usually knows something about each crime, he said, whether that person witnessed something, heard information or received details that could help investigators.

"Coming forward is not about turning against your community. It's about standing up for your community and protecting the people we love, all of us," Mr. Bryan said.

He said violent offenders should no longer be allowed to rely on the silence of witnesses and other residents to avoid prosecution.

Mr. Bryan pledged his support to Police Commissioner Mario Brooks and the men and women of VIPD and asked the community to make the same commitment every day, rather than only after a tragedy.

Mr. Bryan also pointed to a recent executive order permitting qualified law-enforcement officers from other executive-branch agencies to be deputized and placed under the command of the VIPD commissioner.

The measure is intended to increase the personnel available for patrols, enforcement operations and other public-safety efforts across the territory, he said.

The administration would continue examining lawful and responsible actions that could strengthen VIPD and protect the public, according to the governor.

He cautioned, however, that government action could not replace information provided by people within the community.

“At the same time, no executive order, or police operation, or government initiative can replace your eyes, your ears, and your cooperation,” Mr. Bryan said.

He called for residents and law enforcement to stand together against the recent violence.

The governor also recognized officers and personnel from VIPD, the V.I. Port Authority, the Department of Planning and Natural Resources and the V.I. Waste Management Authority who leave their families each day to perform law-enforcement and public-safety duties.

The risks they face can sometimes be forgotten until an officer is killed, Mr. Bryan said.

He asked the community to make clear that it would not tolerate the lawlessness that claimed Officer Charles’s life.

Government and Police Families Mourn

Mr. Bryan opened the address by describing himself as shocked, heartbroken and angered by the killing. He asked Virgin Islanders to pray for Mr. Charles’s family, loved ones and everyone struggling with the loss.

He also addressed VIPD’s sworn officers and civilian employees, telling them the community was grieving alongside them.

The governor acknowledged the particular burden carried by members of law enforcement when one of their colleagues is killed violently and thanked them for their continued service.

He called on residents affected by Mr. Charles’s death and the recent shootings to support one another, reject violence and work together to restore safety. He also urged people to replace hatred and divisive behavior with greater compassion, while recognizing that people are imperfect and make mistakes.

Mr. Bryan closed by praying for Mr. Charles’s family and for the protection of the Virgin Islands after what he described as a tumultuous week and a devastating Sunday.

Anyone with information about Mr. Charles’s killing is asked to contact 911 or the Criminal Investigation Bureau at 340-778-2211. Anonymous tips may be submitted to Crime Stoppers V.I. at 1-800-222-TIPS.