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VIPD Has 59 Vacancies and 95 Employees Eligible to Retire; Overtime Nears \$15.6 Million

VIPD lost 33 employees in FY 2026, including 21 sworn officers, while hiring 25 and carrying 59 vacancies. With 95 employees eligible to retire, officials say low pay and hiring delays are worsening shortages and driving overtime toward \$15.64 million.

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Nelcia Charlemagne **August 12, 2026**

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The V.I. Police Department is confronting a growing manpower challenge as employee departures outpace hiring, 59 positions remain vacant and 95 employees are eligible for retirement, while delays in background checks and psychological evaluations are slowing efforts to bring new officers into the force amid an uptick in violent crime.

Presenting VIPD's fiscal year 2027 budget Tuesday, Police Commissioner Mario Brooks said the department has recorded 33 employee separations during the current fiscal year, including 21 sworn personnel and 12 civilian employees. The departures exceeded the 25 people hired by VIPD during FY 2026.

Of the department's 59 vacancies, only 15 are currently in various stages of being filled. Eight of those positions have been submitted to the Office of Management and Budget for funding.

Brooks attributed the recruitment and retention difficulties to a combination of pay, competition for workers and changing attitudes toward policing.

According to Mr. Brooks, "increased competition among agencies, changing workforce expectations, and a declining number of individuals pursuing careers in policing have made recruiting and retaining qualified officers more challenging than previous years."

Low starting salaries, employment opportunities on the mainland and declining interest in policing as a career have complicated VIPD's efforts to attract officers. Even candidates who are willing to enter the police academy can face delays completing required background checks and psychological assessments.

VIPD Expands Recruitment Efforts as Pay Remains Obstacle

VIPD has expanded its "recruitment campaign" through social media engagement, targeted digital advertising, radio advertisements, billboards and "micro-advertising campaigns" intended to increase awareness of career opportunities.

The department has also introduced an Employee Applicant Referral Incentive Program to "encourage current employees to assist in recruiting qualified candidates," Mr. Brooks said.

At the same time, Brooks told lawmakers that social media coverage showing the dangers and difficulties officers encounter can work against those recruitment efforts.

"Individuals are seeing some of the significant challenges that my officers are encountering, and saying to themselves, 'I'm not doing that for \$35,000'," Commissioner Brooks explained to Senator Avery Lewis. He qualified it as a "major issue."

Brooks agreed that the "starting salary needs to be raised."

Lewis drew attention to the wage disparity, lamenting that "we have custodians making nearly the same amount as the officers."

"It's quite difficult to recruit when individuals know that they can look elsewhere and make a better living for themselves and their family, based on the salary," Mr. Brooks said.

VIPD Human Resources Director Dwayne Richards said the department is also competing directly with federal employers. According to Richards, federal agents are visiting his office to "screen individuals for jobs in the federal government."

Brooks said VIPD is working with unions to "somehow get a raise to the starting salary, and then the unions can then pick from there and negotiate higher salaries."

107 Applicants, but Lawmakers Question Why Only 12 Emerged

VIPD pointed to the 107 applicants processed by its human resources division for the 2026 Police Recruit Classes territorywide as an encouraging sign.

That number did not satisfy Sen. Novelle Francis, chairman of the Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance and a former police commissioner.

Francis asked VIPD to explain how 107 applicants resulted in “all we see out of that was 12 individuals.”

Brooks said a significant number of prospective recruits are lost during the screening process. “We lose a vast number for the background check alone.”

Those reviews include checks of applicants’ criminal histories. “Then, of course, by the time we hit the psychological, there are some individuals that move on and just change their minds,” he added.

Other applicants remain interested but are still awaiting required evaluations.

On St. Croix, Richards said nine applicants are waiting for background checks and 18 are awaiting psychological evaluations. On St. Thomas, seven applicants still need background checks and five are waiting for psychological assessments.

Territorywide, 38 applicants either failed one of those checks or did not submit required documentation.

Francis called for greater urgency. “If we continue along this trend, we will never have police officers to be able to do the job that we’re requiring them to do. There must be some level of urgency in being able to bring these people on board,” he said.

Seven individuals are currently enrolled in the police academy on St. Croix, while those awaiting background and psychological screenings cannot yet join them.

Sen. Kurt Violet warned that prolonged delays could cause VIPD to lose otherwise interested applicants.

“The longer you take, these individuals [will] leave the island. They take other jobs, and they drop out.”

Psychologist Contract Delayed in GVI Buy

Lawmakers learned that procurement of a new psychologist contract is caught up in the GVI Buy process.

Violet told Brooks the situation warrants immediate intervention. “That’s an emergency. You could call the commissioner of Property and Procurement... Why can’t this be expedited when we have a crime surge in the Virgin Islands, and especially as it’s growing?”

Francis went further, advocating for VIPD to employ a full-time psychologist who could conduct evaluations of prospective officers while also providing mental health services to personnel already working on the front line.

The department’s previous psychologist was “terminated”, according to Brooks.

The manpower shortage has also prompted legislative action outside VIPD's own recruitment efforts.

Sen. Kenneth Gittens recently proposed legislation temporarily integrating enforcement arms across the Government of the Virgin Islands. Act 9117 seeks to increase police manpower, strengthen public safety operations and reduce violent crime across the territory. Gov. Albert Bryan Jr. approved the measure.

Reduced Manpower Continues to Drive Overtime

VIPD expects overtime spending to reach \$15,642,244 by the end of FY 2026, according to Brooks. He said that figure represents a 5 percent reduction from FY 2025.

The size of the department's overtime expenditures drew scrutiny from lawmakers.

Gittens cited mainland arrests involving "alleged overtime and payroll-related misconduct" and asked whether VIPD has protocols capable of identifying and preventing similar abuses before they occur in the Virgin Islands.

Brooks said such safeguards are in place.

Gittens nevertheless called for scrutiny of employees who "earn extraordinarily high amounts of overtime in relation to their base salaries."

Based on public records, Gittens said some individuals are receiving "in excess of \$150,000 in overtime payment only."

Brooks said some of that information is "not accurate", but told lawmakers that inappropriate conduct is addressed internally and, in some circumstances, through the judicial system.

Francis also raised concerns about the long-term consequences of heavy dependence on overtime. "We gotta save [them] from themselves. This overtime situation, again, it breeds a level of corruption," he lamented. "When that overtime is no longer available, what are they going to do?"

Budget Figures Draw Attention

The Office of Management and Budget has reduced VIPD's appropriation by approximately \$2 million, from \$8 million to \$6 million.

Brooks testified that OMB's recommended General Fund budget for VIPD was \$73,627,222.54. However, the [publicly available FY 2027 budget book](#) lists \$71,081,017, consistent with the approximately \$2 million reduction referenced by Richards.

VIPD's presentation identified more than \$40.3 million in personnel costs, while OMB's publicly available budget breakdown earmarks \$37.7 million for personnel.

In addition to the General Fund allocation, the department is slated to receive \$3 million from the Tourism Advertising Revolving Fund and more than \$6 million in federal funding.

OMB places VIPD's overall FY 2027 budget at \$80,819,302.

The department must use those resources to address its staffing needs, repair infrastructure, continue investments in technology and work toward ending the longstanding consent decree

while carrying out its public safety responsibilities and working to maintain confidence among residents and business owners.

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