

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Novelle Francis: Officials Caught In Corruption Should Receive "The Harshest" Penalties

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Novelle Francis, former Police Chief and Police Commissioner of the Virgin Islands, has revealed in an interview on [102.1 FM, Life Radio](#) that the community should take seriously crimes committed by people in power.

Those individuals that are held to higher standards that are committing these acts of corruption, they should be receiving the harshest penalties out there.

In light of a report issued last week on the findings of the Inspector General's audit, which found the Office of the Lieutenant Governor had participated in fraud, non-compliance and manipulation when dealing with real estate auctions, Francis, a current candidate

ying for office in the 31st Legislature, said the Virgin Islands needed an "active" watchdog group to stave off corruption.

"We have to have an active anti-corruption task force that deals with these issues of corruption," he said. "We have to send the message that corruption will not be tolerated by using individuals as examples, and ensure that they get the harshest penalty."

As a former law enforcement officer, Francis said he views white-collar crimes as some of the most distasteful, and believes that officials, whether in government or the private sector, who are caught in such activity should be punished to the fullest extent of the law.

"When it comes to corruption, we see it as one of the most heinous, in our opinion, as enforcers," he said. He added that once individuals are caught and convicted in these types of crimes, "afterwards [they should be] paraded in the media to show that these are the things that we will not tolerate in our community. That is what will start to build, and regain the integrity into government and this community."

Last week, in a damning 49-page report, the Office of the Virgin Islands Inspector General laid bare its findings on inspections of government-sanctioned real estate auctions. The report confirmed there was "validity to the allegations of questionable bidding practices and a lack of compliance with statutory regulations governing real property auctions conducted by the Lt. Governor's Office."

The categories of unscrupulous practices were many, specifically that "as a result of procedural changes made in real property auctions by officials at the Lieutenant Governor's Office:

- (a) individuals were allowed to manipulate the bidding process, to fraudulently restrict other potential individuals from making legitimate bids on properties offered for auction,
- (b) questionable and inaccurate bid recording and record keeping brought into question several of the reported highest bids for several properties that were sold,
- (c) properties were not properly researched to ensure that they were eligible for sale,
- (d) payment time frames established by the Code were not properly adhered to,
- (e) adequate documentation of the Notice of Attachment process, as required by the Code, was not always maintained to ensure that taxpayers' constitutional right of due process was followed, and
- (f) auction costs and fees were not assessed and collected once properties were sold or redeemed."

Click [here](#) to read the full report.