

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp: Police Department Ill-Equipped For 21st Century

Government / **Published On January 28, 2015 09:57 AM /**

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What if I told you this evening that we do not have a single active police captain in the territory. Would you believe me? Well, we don't.

The Virgin Islands Police Department (VIPD) is not equipped to handle combat situations it faces regularly, as it is operating without the necessary technology to fight crime in the territory, Governor Kenneth Mapp said Monday night at his first State of the Territory Address on St. Thomas.

After receiving the assessment of the VIPD's condition, the governor said he understood why the department can't seem to retain police officers, and stressed the men and women in uniform should be respected.

"The manpower shortages in our law enforcement community are worse than even I could have imagined," Mapp said. "I cannot speak to the specific numbers here, but I will convene a meeting with members of the Legislature to brief you on the state of law enforcement in the Virgin Islands."

He went on, "Let me say that I now fully understand why we cannot keep police officers in our department. We must respect and support their sacrifices, and provide them with real and tangible resources so they can do their jobs. Police officers put themselves in harm's way for our protection. We must respect and support this sacrifice."

Reviving his campaign promise to make available 1,000 government jobs upon entering office, Mapp said his initial assessment of adding 250 new police officers to the VIPD might have been insufficient.

"Our police department is struggling with an absence of personnel," the governor said. "Let me repeat that -- an absence of personnel; insufficient boots on the ground. The department is operating with a complete absence of technology; don't let the lap top computers in the cars mislead you. Our police department is trying to do its job of protecting the territory, and we have failed to provide technological resources for them to fight crime. "

From there, the governor revealed the various ways in which the VIPD, because of its lack of proper tools to perform critical work, has failed to combat crime in an effective manner. He also exposed how disconnected the law enforcement departments are, which, he says, stalled the process of bringing criminals to justice.

"Call reports from the 911 center arrive at the police department months after they are recorded. Police chiefs and zone commanders cannot accurately deploy resources in communities without the timely receipt of this information. Crime investigative technology tools--none. Ready access to DMV records of driver's licenses and motor vehicle registration information--none.

"Connectivity to the Superior Court's database to access suspended driver license information and outstanding warrants--none. Ability to identify fingerprints found at crime scenes--none. Our police department is operating with an absence of technology in the performance of its duties."

Mapp added, "What if I told you this evening that we do not have a single active police captain in the territory. Would you believe me? Well, we don't."

Even so, as was his strategy for the one-hour speech, after making known the ills facing the police department, Mapp spoke of ways his administration will undertake the problems, and bring the VIPD back to a place of respect and effectiveness.

First, Mapp said, "A full top-to-bottom assessment of our entire law enforcement community, so we can build a strategy for professional policing in the territory. This assessment will not be limited to VIPD, but will also include our port authority police, officers at the DPNR and DLCA."

From there, the governor said he would meet with labor unions to brainstorm initiatives to bring police officers back on board. Mapp also said his administration would pair the

VIPD with a "major police department on the mainland for training, mentorship and acquisition of federal resources to fight crime," adding, "we will lead the effort to establish a police foundation within the business community to further support our officers and our department."

The governor did not reveal the mainland police department he would tap to mentor the VIPD.

Ending his discussion on the police department, Mapp said his administration would take a path that will eventually lead the department out of consent decree, "and march towards a professional law enforcement community where we begin to nurture our police talent in our high schools, and grow leadership within the department by encouraging, supporting and incensitizing our officers to pursue higher education and training outside the department."