

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Gittens Calls On VIPD Commish To Step Up Enforcement Following Weekend Shootings

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St. Croix Sen. Kenneth Gittens has called upon VIPD Commissioner Designee Delroy Richards to increase enforcement initiatives following two homicides in St. Thomas over the weekend, including [one on Saturday night](#) at Coki Point Beach and the other, [a gang-related killing](#), near Hospital Ground.

Gittens said the situation is "quite troubling that right here at home, in our small family-oriented community -- that says tourism is our leading product -- we could not get by the first month of the new year without experiencing five senseless killings."

The senator added that there is "no reason why anyone should be denied the freedom to traverse the streets of where we call home and no reason why anyone should not feel safe going to or coming off our beaches."

While the territory is still struggling to rebound from economic woes its been facing since 2008, Gittens maintained that the VIPD should consistently provide adequate protection for residents by employing new strategies, even with the limited resources available to it.

To do so, Gittens called on the department's leadership to come up with inventive ideas and how the department's workforce could be best harnessed. He also called for the department to focus on the crime areas.



Senator Kenneth "Kenny" Gittens

"Coming from the police department myself as a senior ranking officer not too long ago, I am fully aware of the limited manpower resources within the department; however, the department's performance goals calls for the maximization of operational efficiency and effectiveness," he said. "In order to do so, we must shift manpower around and put the boots on the ground where they would count the most. With a global economy that's rebounding, we as a small territory, cannot afford to let a few thugs continue to take over our streets."

Sen. Gittens also revealed that, upon hearing of the shooting death at Coki Point Beach in St. Thomas, he phoned Richards and Governor Mapp, and received assurances from both men that there would be a meeting of the minds, of which the 31st Legislature would be a part, where solutions for the current situation would be brainstormed.

"I am confident that Governor Mapp shares the same sentiments while he, too, comes from a law enforcement background and will do everything within his authority to address the crime situation that's been plaguing us as a territory for the last several years," he said.

"I, too, as a key stakeholder in this, will continue my pursuit of measures aimed at addressing this critical problem in coordination and collaboration with other stakeholders," Gittens concluded.

The territory's first homicide occurred on St. Croix, when Jose Miguel Hernandez Rosa, 29, of Marley Homes, [was found fatally wounded](#) by gunfire Jan. 16 in Estate Whim.

On Jan. 18, 38-year-old Jason Young [was found shot to death](#) in Ulke Gade, St. Thomas.

On Jan. 23, police ruled the death of Merle Natta, 54, of St. Thomas, a murder [after finding her body in a burning house](#) in Estate Mandal.

On Jan. 26 at about 6:15 p.m., St. Thomas police were called to the scene of gunshots fired in the vicinity of Bldg. 21 at the Hidden Valley Apartments. When they arrived at the location, [they found an unresponsive male victim, 21-year-old Ezekiah Joseph](#), suffering from gunshot wounds. He was pronounced dead at the scene by Emergency Medical Technicians and taken to the Schneider Regional Medical Center.

On Jan. 29, Lester Jackson, Jr., 26, was arrested and charged with negligent homicide [in the death of 16-year-old Elivs Smith, Jr.](#) after an investigation by traffic enforcement officers into the Jan. 9 accident on St. John determined that Jackson fell asleep at the wheel of his car and lost control of the vehicle, causing it to crash into a utility pole.

Image Credit: *USVI Government*