

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Sen. Francis: No Time To 'Point Fingers' In Latest Shooting Death

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In the wake of Monday's [fatal shooting](#) on St. Croix near the Eulalie Rivera Elementary School in Estate Grove Place, Sen. Novelle Francis, Jr. issued a statement encouraging the community to unite in an effort to stem the recent rash of violent crime plaguing the territory.

"This is not the time to point fingers," Francis said. "It is heartbreaking every time a family loses a loved one to violent crime. My prayers are with the families of all who have lost someone to violent crime. Now is the time to come together as a community to address our issues with crime."

According to Francis, who is a former police commissioner and career law enforcement professional, and is also chair of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security, Public Safety and Justice, many of the social issues impacting the community cannot be



Eulalie Rivera Elementary School in

Grove Place

"In my experience, crime is the visible and tangible result of what happens when we fail to develop economic opportunities, build a skilled workforce, create jobs, and provide quality education to all," said Francis. "A lack of opportunities has made it harder for everyone to fully participate in our community and enjoy a decent quality of life."

As a result, Francis has called on his Senate colleagues to work together to solve the territory's socio-economic problems.

"Our ability to create safer communities for all Virgin Islanders will take a collective effort," he stated. "Whether it means a combination of factors such as a greater police presence, residents reporting the perpetrators of these crimes, and significant initiatives to put people to work, I am hopeful that we can curb the frequency of crime throughout the territory."

Sen. Kenneth Gittens, vice-chairman of the Committee on Homeland Security, Justice and Public Safety, also issued a statement reiterating his concern for the safety of the territory's youngest citizens and has renewed a call for the increase of police enforcement initiatives.

"I was quite alarmed when I received word of what was happening," Gittens said of today's deadly shooting near the elementary school. "My concern at the time was the safety and security of the students, faculty and staff at the school. I immediately went to the school itself and met with the school administrators. I was relieved to see that the school monitor had full control of the front gate area and there was a police presence on campus as the school had already implemented proper security protocol to safeguard the occupants."

In his first term, Sen. Gittens passed legislation that addresses the carrying of an unlicensed firearm within a thousand feet of a school. The new legislation covers public and private schools, school bus stops, and public or private senior citizen centers. It calls for the maximum punishment to be doubled once convicted.

"These senseless incidents, occurring so close to what we as a community consider being safe havens for our children, are troubling. Again, I am fully aware of the limited manpower resources within the police department; however, I am once again encouraging the leadership of the police department to shift manpower around and put the boots on the ground where it will count most.

"I will support our law enforcement entity's initiative and assist with necessary legislation; however, we must see some results in the reduction of crime and increase their crime prevention efforts," Gittens said.

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