

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Plaskett Details Role In Helping Territory Fight Crime, Invites Virgin Islanders To Selma March To Highlight Voting Rights

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At a recent press briefing with reporters on St. Croix following a week of meetings with local agency and department heads, Congresswoman Stacey Plaskett, calling herself an elected public servant, not a politician, outlined a number of ways her office is working to bolster the crime-prevention efforts of the Virgin Islands Government.

"I'm very careful about staying in my lane and staying within what's my jurisdiction as opposed to what is the governor's and not second-guessing our Chief Executive Officer," Plaskett began, "I know that is his responsibility in how to police our streets."

However, she said, the areas she can help and would like to "alert" Governor Mapp to is "this notion that our schools were not able to receive funding assistance for after-school incentive programs."

Without after-school and summer activities in place to help steer young people clear of deviant behavior, Plaskett said, "that in itself can lead to additional crime."

"We would need assistance in our vocational schools, so our children and our young people have avenues to be able to be productive rather than having to put themselves in risky behavior or in enterprises which lead to crime," she said. "That's that's one way I think my office can help." She pointed out that the U.S. Department of Justice provides funding for those kinds of programs.

Furthermore, Plaskett said there is funding available from the U.S. Department of Agriculture that will be useful for training the territory's youth.

"How do we get assistance from the Department of Agriculture to grow our vocational training, to grow our skill sets for our young people? That's something that we need to look into, as well," she said.

The congresswoman said one of the things she will also push in Washington is getting people, Virgin Islanders, who "understand the nuances of our culture" to fill key roles at certain federal agencies that work to secure the territory's borders.

"We can actually hire Virgin Islanders in those positions, that's something that I will work on, in terms of nominations or employment in the federal government for a lot of these federal agencies, whether it be the Drug Enforcement Agency or higher," Plaskett said.

The freshman congresswoman said she recently met with members of the U.S. Coast Guard, an area of which she has oversight, "to discuss matters pertaining to the territory's borders.

"They were concerned about how little manpower they have here in the Virgin Islands," Plaskett said. "We have to sit down with the Department of Defense and talk about increasing the numbers of individuals that are policing our borders so that we do not have the drugs and the guns coming in. People always talk about the drugs, but the guns, as well," Plaskett said.

Plaskett also pointed out that she would highlight the "enormous increase in undocumented individuals that come into the territory through our ports and public borders" in a meeting scheduled this week with the chair and the ranking member of Homeland Security.

"I want to really make them focus on how important the borders of the Virgin Islands are, and how there has been a tremendous increase in drugs into the territory in the last couple of years, as well as guns," Plaskett said, adding, "[It's important to] really make them aware that some of those undocumented individuals and workers are not just coming from traditional places, which is the Eastern Caribbean, but they're also picking up people from the Middle East, from Asia, coming into the United States."

She continued: "So, I think that if we're increasing protection of our borders more, I think that's a way that I can help, as well as assist in finding funding, not only for increasing our police force, but also to assist our young people."

Turning the conversation to the voting rights of Virgin Islands' residents, Plaskett noted that as the 50th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 approaches, which was preceded by the historic voting rights march in Selma, Ala., the subject of the Oscar-nominated film, *Selma*, she invites Virgin Islanders everywhere to join her in Selma on March 6 for a commemorative reenactment of the march.

"I have talked to the organizers of that march, in particular Congressman John Lewis, and let him know that I am very concerned about the fact that Virgin Islanders, as well as all of the territories, do not have voting rights-- can't vote for the president, don't have a vote on the floor -- and asked him, if he doesn't mind, I'd like to really highlight that in that march."

She said her office has been in discussions with the Atlanta-area [Virgin Islands Association of Georgia](#) and a similar organization in Washington, DC, who are spreading the word to get Virgin Islanders to attend the march.

"The president will be in that march and we are going to make it a point to put that in front of him," Plaskett said. "That this is the 50th anniversary of the March on Selma and that there are Virgin Islanders, as well as the other territories, that do not have that right. Over 3 million people don't have the right to vote for president and these are citizens of the United States."

For more information on the 50th anniversary March on Selma, go [here](#).