

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Overtime Pay Costing VIPD Over \$11 Million Annually

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ST. CROIX -- The Virgin Islands Police Department revealed at a Committee On Finance hearing Wednesday at the Frits E. Lawaetz Conference Room that over \$11 million is spent on overtime pay every year.

That's according to VIPD Commissioner Delroy Richards, Sr., who announced the number during his testimony, and made known that the force has been faced with many challenges, including recruitment, problems with retaining officers who are offered better salaries elsewhere, and other pressing issues.

But the most glaring problem remained the issue of the over \$11 million that the department spent in overtime pay for fiscal year 2015, with \$3,814,187 being spent in the

St. Thomas-St. John district, \$3,437,793 in the St. Croix district, and \$4,628,478 for outside agencies. These agencies include the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs, the Department of Planning and Natural Resources and others. VIPD officials said the overtime amount for FY 2016 was on track to be on par with last year's total.

Sen. Kurt Violet, St. Croix Democrat, said if the 823 employees that are currently employed at the VIPD were to be given raises of \$10,000 each, it would make up the \$11 million that is currently being spent on overtime. However, the difference would be that the same officers would no longer need to do overtime because of the raise, according to the senator.

"This would do a couple of things: 1), more people will want to become police officers because you've just increased the pay by \$10,000. 2), officers no longer need to hustle to make an extra dollar because they need to pay their mortgage, and 3), just by having additional police officers you're going to automatically decrease the overtime and increase moral."

Violet also highlighted positions in the VIPD that remains vacant, noting that many of those same positions don't require college degrees and can be filled immediately. The senator said with the high rate of unemployment currently plaguing the territory -- specifically St. Croix, job openings, when available, should be made known to the public.

But Richards said it's hard to fill the positions even if the department wants to, because the funding that would normally be available to do so goes into paying overtime work.

Richards also made known that the VIPD was currently understaffed by over 200 police officers territory-wide, but the problem lies in the difficulty of recruiting, as many have had trouble passing the test.

The commissioner said there are only two times in a year when new officers graduate, because to join the VIPD, one must go through various stages -- from the exams, training and other tests -- a process that lasts six months.

In February, Governor Kenneth Mapp said the VIPD had problems recruiting police officers locally and that the department would need to start looking for bodies outside the territory if the situation persisted.

"As Commissioner Richards indicated, we've actually begun that process and believe we have some issues with testing," Mapp said [at the press conference](#). "In fact, most of us in Government House want to sit the test because we don't understand how this test that's at a seventh-grade written level — the quad section uses no more than two digits in the arithmetic section — and we had twenty-eight people sit this test a few weeks ago, and three people passed.

"Part of the assessment is to determine why are we having these kinds of numbers, what's the issue, and are we targeting the right pool of folks for law enforcement in the community," the governor said.

At today's hearing, Richards revealed that T&M Protection Resources, LLC, the New York-based firm [hired to assess all parts of the VIPD](#), was already in the territory.

Another cost-saving measure briefly brought to the fore by Sen. Violet was the potential scaling back of j'ouvert morning activities during carnival season, which Violet assumed costs the government hundreds of thousands of dollars for security.

In the end, Richards said the ideal solution would be to find new ways of funding vacancies until the adequate officers were recruited to the force. The hearing ended cordially, with senators willing to do what it takes to help the VIPD, while remaining mindful of the constraints created by the lack of funds.

"We're willing to do more to help the VIPD but truth be told we're dealing with a limited pot of money," Sen. Graham said. The Finance Committee chair stated that to add just 10 percent to the department's budget means taking money from elsewhere, and that's always a difficult decision.