

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Submits Bill Calling For New Fleet Of Emergency Vehicles, Executive Branch Limousines

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ST. THOMAS -- Governor Kenneth Mapp on Friday submitted legislation to the 31st Legislature calling for a new fleet of emergency vehicles for the territory's first responder and law enforcement agencies, contending that it remains paramount that these agencies possess the right equipment in their efforts to protect the islands' residents.

The governor also called for a new array of what he's calling "ceremonial vehicles," which are the limousines that transport himself and Lieutenant Governor Osbert Potter, making known that the last set were purchased in 2005 and are in constant need of repair.

"Having adequate vehicles and equipment for our first responders and law enforcement agencies in the territory is paramount to protecting the safety and welfare of our residents and visitors. For many years our first responders have valiantly done their duty with less than standard vehicles and equipment," Mapp said in his transmittal letter to Senate President Neville James.

"The Virgin Islands Police Department is operating with vehicles in and outside the terms of their Collective Bargaining Agreement. The Virgin Islands Fire Services is operating with substandard, non-functional and obsolete fire suppression vehicles. The Virgin Islands Department of Health is operating ambulances and emergency medical support vehicles that are substandard and obsolete, some dating back to 1999. The Territorial Medical Examiner has operated with a lack of adequate equipment, biological and pathological equipment and vehicles to properly transport, autopsy and examine human remains.

"As we increase our law enforcement efforts, the Medical Examiner's office must be equipped to provide the forensic pathology work as well as the forensic investigative skills necessary to ensure that we are providing competent assessment of evidence in the administration of justice. The misconception that the Medical Examiner's office simply transports deceased persons from a crime scene to the morgue is one that we must change in our community. The Medical Examiner's responsibility includes the processing of evidence to effectively assist law enforcement in solving crimes.

"To that end, vehicles used to transport deceased individuals must and should be industry standard. In addition, we must provide resources for the Medical Examiner to upgrade forensic equipment within the lab," said the territory's leader.

In making his case for the new fleet of ceremonial vehicles, the governor echoed what high-ranking members of his administration told senators on the Committee on Finance in [early July](#) during a budget hearing for the Office of the Governor -- which totaled \$9.3 million for FY2016 -- and also gave an example to strengthen his argument.

"The Governor's official vehicles were purchased back in 2005; they are in constant need of repair and are an embarrassment to the territory", Mapp said. "During my inauguration on January 5, my official vehicle collapsed at Emancipation Garden and I had to be transported to the next inaugural event via police transport. I suppose this was symbolic of the state of the government I was inheriting. Currently the Lieutenant Governor travels via police vehicles because he has no functioning official vehicle."

Included in the executive branch's budget were three new limousines costing \$120,000 in total according to Nellie Varlack, director of business and administration. One limousine would be on St. Croix and another here for the governor, and one for the Potter. Varlack did not specify on which island Potter's limousine would be stationed.

But the governor did not clarify why the allocation for the new ceremonial vehicles were being removed from Government House's budget and placed in legislation calling for fresh batch of first responder vehicles.

The bill also includes funding for the Bureau of Corrections to improve security systems at its various facilities, including security and video surveillance systems at the Golden

Grove Correctional facility.

Another measure, also sponsored by Government House, would fund the repairs to the Horace Clark Ball Park on the west end of St. Croix.

"This west end park has served as a place for the community to play softball and baseball with their families and friends. With the Paul E. Joseph Stadium and Terrence Martin Ballpark facilities under demolition and reconstruction, children and adults are in need of facilities in the town of Frederiksted," Mapp said.

"The Commissioner of Sports, Parks & Recreation has completed an assessment of the ballpark and determined that there is a need to demolish and renovate certain areas of the park and the appropriation requested will accomplish this task. The Lt. Governor and I are committed to providing safe and up to date facilities for our youth. We thank Senator Kurt Vialet for making this recommendation and we agree with him by forwarding this proposal to the legislature," he concluded.