

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Virgin Islands Moves Closer To Having Its Own Forensic Lab

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ST. THOMAS -- On July 2, Governor Kenneth Mapp, fresh from a whirlwind trip spanning Washington to New York, said at a press conference here that it was of utmost importance to his administration that the police force has its own forensic lab in the territory.

He said during his days at the Public Finance Authority, three to four million dollars had been set aside for that very purpose, and that the Department of Justice had rented a facility on St. Croix to house the lab.

It never got off the ground, however, and Mapp was hoping to revive the project.

But Senators Novelle Francis, Jr. and Neville James are bringing the governor's vision to pass with a measure that addresses this very concern. [Bill 31-0145](#), "an Act establishing a forensic crime lab in accordance with national standards," says the Justice Department "shall establish, staff, and equip a forensic crime laboratory in the Virgin Islands."

The bill also calls for the lab to be "accredited by the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors (LAB), Laboratory Accreditation Board, the National Forensic Science Technology Center, or other nationally recognized accrediting organization that has requirements that are substantially equivalent to or more comprehensive than those of the Society or the Center."

Support for the legislation at the Earl B. Ottley Legislative Hall last Friday, through the Committee on Justice and Public Safety, chaired by Senator Francis, was universal, but some testifiers had concerns about funding sources, as the measure identified none.

[Newly-nominated](#) Acting Attorney General Claude Walker said he was concerned that while the measure is what the territory needs right now, lack of funding would see it becoming another bill that becomes law but remains unfulfilled. This prompted Sen. Francis to inquire of Police Commissioner Delroy Richards, Sr., the total amount of funds expended on outside forensic testing annually. Richards said he could not give a definite answer, but he was sure the number was in the "hundreds of thousands."

And there is also federal funding for such a lab, but Deputy Attorney General Renee Gumbs-Carty said the funding was not merely enough. However, with strong support from the governor, the prospects of finding funding for the measure seems to be high.

[During the July press conference](#), Mapp said it's paramount that the territory get to the point of having its own forensic testing lab, because "I know that we're still reliant, in this day and age, on analysis of forensic specimens of crime scenes on the FBI labs. And given 9/11, you must understand and appreciate the lack of priority that our evidence is receiving when it ends up at the FBI labs and what delay it causes in closing out and solving criminal activity or cases in the territory.

"So we're going to move in a very strident way to get to the point where we can setup our own forensic lab in the territory," the governor concluded.

Voting to send the measure to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary were Senators Justin Harrigan, Sr., Francis, Almando "Rocky" Liburd, Sammuel Sanes and Jean Forde. Nereida Rivera-O'reily and Gittens were absent.