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## Funds to Install Surveillance Cameras to Fight Crime Have Been Sitting at the PFA for 6 Years

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Over the years, government officials have talked up the importance of combating the crime problem the Virgin Islands has seemingly perennially faced. But funding for the installation of what has [proven to be](#) one of the most effective crime-prevention tools — surveillance cameras, serving as effective deterrents to would-be criminals — has sat at the Public Finance Authority (PFA) since 2014 and has not been utilized to this day.

That's according to Senator Novelle Francis, a former police chief and police commissioner, who spoke with the Consortium Friday about the matter. The senator has been attempting to get movement on the installation of the surveillance cameras for years, including attempts during the Governor Kenneth Mapp administration. To this day, however, he said \$1 million for the installation of the cameras has not been put to use.

Mr. Francis introduced legislation to at least have surveillance cameras at the traffic lights. From there, work would go to other areas for an eventual full coverage setup that would force criminals to think twice before acting, knowing that cameras may be watching. The bill, however, is still in the committee process.

"Every time there is a major incident, we have where police go to businesses to capture whatever information that they have. Sometimes the systems are working, sometimes they're not. In some instances there's a reluctance from business owners to release the information for their safety and security," Mr. Francis said. He stressed that the time had long passed for the territory to have its own system in place.

Aside from the \$1 million available, Mr. Francis revealed that a private donor, following Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017, had committed through the St. Croix Foundation to fund the installation of surveillance cameras. However, the donor pulled out after seeing no traction to get the installation process moving, according to the senator.

"The donor just lost confidence and pulled back his funding because it just took the government so long in order to be able to get the system up and running," Mr. Francis said. The donor "offered to install as well as provide maintenance funding for it."

Mr. Francis, a former police commissioner, said the police force has been challenged with manpower dating back to his time at the helm in 2010. And now, he said, the force is 33 percent smaller than it was in 2010 — even more reason to install cameras that would assist the department in combating the crime problem that has plagued the U.S. Virgin Islands, he suggested. So far, [20 people have died through homicides](#) in the territory in 2020. On the current trajectory, the USVI could top 40 homicide deaths by year's end if strong counter measures are not implemented.

Asked why would the territory's leaders leave unspent \$1 million for an initiative that could reduce crime when crime is one of the most daunting challenges facing the USVI, Mr. Francis said, "That's my level of frustration. We know everywhere else, Europe, United States — all over — that they're deploying surveillance cameras to assist them in fighting crime."

Governor Albert Bryan [said last week](#) that installation of the surveillance cameras will be done later this year. The governor did not give a timeframe, but said that funding was already in place and that his administration was looking to expand the financial resources available. Mr. Francis said he has been having discussions on the installation of the cameras with Mr. Bryan for months. He said he has also sat with the Bureau of Information Technology, which will be critical with implementation, on several occasions during the former and current administrations.

Once the cameras are installed, a control room will be established where the cameras will be manned, Mr. Francis said. A main vein could be at the 911 Emergency Call Center as well as feeds at the various police stations. "With today's technology you could have the feed all over," Mr. Francis said. The third-term Democrat said part of his proposal includes the hiring of disabled individuals to monitor the cameras, the idea being to provide employment for an underserved segment of the community while fulfilling a critical component of combating crime.

"Even though they might be disabled, they have a lot of abilities," Mr. Francis said.