

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Damning Assessment Of VIPD Finds Lack Of Homicide Data, Low Morale Caused By Poor Compensation And Consent Decree Confusion

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ST. THOMAS -- The Virgin Islands Police Department is in need of serious, focused change in almost all important segments of its operations, [a \\$300,000 assessment](#) performed by T&M Protection Resources, LLC has found. The results of the evaluation were revealed [at the first](#) 2016 Committee on Homeland Security, Public Safety and Justice hearing held at the Earl B. Ottley Legislative Hall here on Thursday.

The findings, simply put, are damning. The assessment unearths major deficiencies within the VIPD that have kept the force from achieving its primary goal of effectively

protecting residents, and brings to the fore a troubling norm within the force about the consent decree that has stymied effective policing efforts. But the biggest culprit of the VIPD's lack of effectual policing, according to the findings, is the absence of adequate compensation, with officers in the territory being grossly underpaid compared to their US mainland counterparts.

All these issues combined brought the department to the nadir of its existence just before Delroy Richards Sr. took up the role of police commissioner early last year, thrusting him into an environment that demanded immediate change -- all while an upsurge of [criminal activity](#) had [taken hold](#), leading to a rise in homicide deaths and even more weapons confiscation in 2015; as outlaws remained on the loose, some of them having committed several crimes.

In speaking with Mr. Richards following yesterday's hearing, the commissioner told The Consortium that under his leadership, the VIPD had made substantial progress -- up to 50 percent -- on the assessment's findings.

"We did not wait until the analysis was complete to move forward," Mr. Richards said. "We brought in two analysts and have already corrected many of the problems. And because we had a draft of what was being uncovered, we had some clarity, but we decided not to disturb the report because you uncover what you uncover," he said. Mr. Richards revealed that a meeting was held with Governor Kenneth Mapp following the completion of the assessment, and said the territory's leader wanted the people to know what was found.

Summoned by Novelle Francis, chairman of the Committee, several T&M officials, hailing from law enforcement backgrounds, relayed to senators their firm's findings and what needed to be effectuated.

T&M team members visited all three VIPD sites in the territory. They requested, received and reviewed hundreds of pages of relevant documents that would influence their assessment strategy. During their visits of the three VIPD sites, the team conducted ride-along drives and interviewed personnel across ranks, as well as community members, elected officials and federal officers, among others, totalling to 100 individuals.

The first major finding on the firm's list was compensation. It found comparatively low pay and no contractual increases for four years.

"A VIPD trainee in the training academy makes \$28,500 per year and \$30,000 after one year with the VIPD. The median annual wage earned by police officers as of 2011 was \$54,230, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The city or state where police officers work affects their wages. As of 2012, the starting salary for officers in the Miami Police Department was \$45,929. New police officers working for the Los Angeles Police Department start earning \$46,583 with a high school diploma. Starting salary for police officers in Columbus, Ohio was \$43,430. Obviously, a salary increase and a lifting of the pay step freeze is needed to improve recruitment and retention for the VIPD," reads the report.

At a Tuesday press conference, [governor Kenneth Mapp announced](#) that his administration would give pay raises to seven government department and agencies by

bringing them in step with their current contractual agreements. The VIPD was among that group.

Another major failing of the VIPD has been its ability to collect crime data and the poor management that follows when it's able to do so. In fact, the VIPD is currently using a manual paper incident report system, which has caused a delay in the review process that takes weeks and months to complete, leading to yet another delay in reporting data to investigators. The process is hindered further because data takes even longer to arrive at central records, and data from St. Croix never arrive.

"No meaningful crime analysis capability means no ability to distribute timely data such as electronic pin maps. No strategic planning means no strategic deployment of resources and a decreased ability to manage crime, the T&M report divulges. And as a result, the community is dissatisfied with the process of obtaining report copies.

The firm also gave an example of the VIPD's failure to effectively collect data:

- T&M requested relatively basic homicide data and associated pin maps
- Assembly of data required manual search and report prep and took weeks
- No St. Croix data was included; manual search would need to be conducted thereat
- No pin maps were available
- Had a RMS been in place and integrated with crime analysis software, the response would have likely been much simpler to assemble

T&M recommended that the VIPD acquire and implement a state-of-the-market RMS with a robust incident/complaint module capable of producing and distributing relevant reports to assist in analysis of the data collected in the reports.

"The capability to access and conduct real-time searches of data collected from reports across the Department should be provided to all commanders and selected staff, including within investigative units. These systems can provide many different modules such as roll call, personnel and overtime tracking, investigative case management, property management inventory, computer assisted dispatch (CAD) and others. T&M was informed during our Oct. visit that Smart Cop RMS is in the implementation process and 2 crime analysts have been added," reads the report.

The assessment also found, based on rank and file personnel interviewed, that "choice assignments and discretionary promotions result from a VIPD culture of favoritism and nepotism. The assessment noted an extension of the VI culture of strong extended familial loyalty as the culprit. And it found that extraordinary gaps in supervisory ranks exist due to a failure of promotional exams to produce adequate numbers of candidates.

"It is not unusual for zones to be without a supervisor on patrol or a supervisor in the station house," reads the report. "During T&M's visit to St. Croix, every supervisor working was at training; the officers on the island were completely unsupervised."

To further facilitate cost savings and operational efficacy, T&M recommended consolidating all enforcement agencies -- Taxicab Commission, Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs, Department of Planning and Natural Resources, Governor's Executive Security Unit, and the Port Authority -- under the VIPD. However, it noted that such an undertaking would require significant restructuring and re-organization, and

possibly legislative action.

Finally, the five-year consent decree that was levied by the federal government in 2009, was extended because the VIPD failed deadlines established to achieve compliance.

According to the assessment, while some officers see the consent decree as a "blessing", in that it provides a means through which the VIPD could implement much-needed reforms, others see the decree as a hindrance.

But T&M said it saw nothing wrong with the decree, and that the requirements thereof, though substantial, could have been met -- a step that would have freed the VIPD from the federal government's probing eye.

"Based on our analysis of available data, T&M believes that the consent decree has in fact been a positive "change agent" for the VIPD, despite what appears to have been prolonged resistance to compliance with its mandates," reads the report. Mr. Richards said during yesterday's hearing that the prevailing notion pinning the consent decree as the miscreant to the force's failed policing efforts, has changed drastically under his leadership.

Police interviewed said the consent decree's disciplinary matrix prevents them from forcefully fulfilling their duties. But according to the report, "many were unable to explain or otherwise indicated that they misunderstood the role the disciplinary matrix played in determining disciplinary penalties.

It added: "After six years operating under a Federal Consent Decree, too many members lack clarity on the role, terms, conditions, and requirements of the Consent Decree. T&M believes it has not been communicated well enough throughout the Department."

Feature Image: Thirty-three peace officers an at oath of office ceremony at Government House in Christianstet, St. Croix, on December 14, 2015.

Image Credit: VIC.