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Reminding USVI Has one of the Highest Murder Rates in the World, Jackson Vows to Press on With Bill to Create Office of Gun Violence Prevention

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Senator Myron Jackson on Friday said he was determined to press forward on Bill No. 33-0126, an act to establish an Office of Gun Violence Prevention under the Office of the Governor, which remained in the Committee on Rules and Judiciary held at the Legislature Thursday.

“It is truly unfortunate that some members of the institution tried to kill a measure addressing the blood running through our streets, without offering any amendment or possible solution,” Mr. Jackson said. “Yesterday we had an eye-opening look at the confined thinking that limits and blocks the progress of the Virgin Islands. In a time where the world is crying out that black lives matter, the actions of yesterday publicly said otherwise, and that we have a lot of work to do in showing that we care about the lives of our people.”

Out of a committee comprising 7 members, votes on the measure considered Thursday reached an impasse with one member absent, and the other votes split evenly. Members voted 3 to 3 to hold it in the committee, then 3 to 3 to table it indefinitely. The deadlock ultimately means the measure remains in the Committee on Rules and Judiciary, and can be considered again, as confirmed by the Legislature's legal counsel.

Mr. Jackson said much of the criticism of Bill No. 33-0126 centered around what his office deemed "misconceptions" that it adds another layer of bureaucracy to entities already tasked with doing what the measure seeks to do. He said, however, that what is being missed is that the Office of Gun Violence Prevention would serve as a coordination point, where none currently exists, to unite scattered and piecemeal efforts by governmental and non-profit entities under one umbrella. By bringing critical wrap-around services under one agency, longterm reduction in gun violence is more likely.

Also distinguishing the proposed office is that it focuses solely on gun violence prevention instead of the breadth of all types of crime – which fall under the mandates of the VI Police Department and Law Enforcement Planning Commission, Mr. Jackson said. The Office of Gun Violence Prevention would also be tasked with providing new and creative solutions for preventing gun violence through a heavily driven community-oriented, rather than a police-centered, approach. The establishment of social programs and proactive and preventative techniques are at the crux of the office's purpose, according to the release.

“Across the states and in our region, we see similar strategies that have drastically reduced gun violence,” Senator Jackson said. “As we delay this measure, the numbers of gun-related deaths in our territory continue to rise, with the Police Department reporting 24 so far this year, and the Virgin Islands having one of the highest murder rates in the world. I will continue my advocacy to stem this pandemic decimating our community daily and urge my colleagues to be guided by what really matters and join in supporting this proposal.”