

The Virgin Islands Consortium

V.I.P.D. 'Moving In The Direction Of Change,' Commissioner Says, As Force Seeks \$66.8 Million Budget

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Police Commissioner Delroy Richards

ST. CROIX -- Police Commissioner Delroy Richards, above, said on Wednesday that there were changes on multiple fronts happening now at the Virgin Islands Police Department, defending the force's fiscal year 2017 budget of \$66,889,820 before senators who make up the Committee on Finance, chaired by Senator Clifford Graham.

Held at the Fritz E. Lawaetz Legislative Hall here, Mr. Richards divulged details on various issues affecting the force. Yet, as he spoke, it became clear that many of the issues that [affected the Police Department in 2015](#), are some of the same troubles it face this year. Mr. Richards spoke of the consent decree that the V.I.P.D. has been under since a 2008 federal lawsuit, and predicted that the force would not meet the August deadline and would therefore seek an extension.

Overtime pay, like last year, remains a stubborn problem at the department. According to Mr. Graham, the V.I.P.D. has expended near \$10 million in overtime costs for this 2016, and is expected to burn through \$14 million by the end of this fiscal year. That number is up \$3 million from 2015's overtime costs of \$11 million. However, while last year's problem was underfunding, this year the force simply needed more boots on the ground -- a problem that Mr. Richards says will continue because when new police recruits graduate, some choose positions with other governmental department and agencies -- the judicial system, for example -- because those jobs offer the same or better salaries and benefits, with a fixed 9-5 work week.

The commissioner contends that the problem is causing a brain drain in the V.I.P.D., and said he would welcome the ability to manage the deployment of all officers to determine the best route of deployment.

Mr. Richards was sure to highlight the changes he deemed as positive that are currently taking place, and vowed to continue working to diminish the upsurge in gun violence in St. Thomas that has dominated headlines.

"As the department continues to move in the direction of change, we will require appropriate funding so that the department's mission will not become compromised," he said. In recent times, Mr. Richards [replaced](#) former police chiefs Darren Foy and Arthur Hector, Sr. in St. Thomas and St. Croix respectively, and replaced them with Jason Marsh and Winsbut McFarlande. The new chiefs, in [separate meetings](#) with the media, detailed some of the initiatives currently being implemented in their efforts to crush the criminal element. Their success or failure, Mr. Richards' remarks suggest, is dependent on the level of financial support the department has. The V.I.P.D.'s original 2017 budget totaled \$68,714,820, but the commissioner said he would settle for the Mapp administration's recommendation of \$66,889,820, and would call for more if need be. Last year, the force's budget was \$63,430,184.

During his testimony, Mr. Richards gave some statistics, revealing that robberies had decreased by 39 percent from 2015 to present, grand larceny was down by 23 percent and burglaries dropped by 11 percent. There were increases, however, including felony assaults by 12 percent and rape by 7 percent. Homicides increased too, with the territory-wide total -- included three vehicular homicides -- being 33 so far in 2016, of which 22 occurred in St. Thomas and 9 in St. Croix.