

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Consent Decree: It's Up To V.I.P.D. To Determine Speed Of Completion, Says Monitor

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ST. CROIX -- Just off the Melvan Evans Highway near Kingshill, in the former HOVENSA Training Center -- now owned by the Government of the Virgin Islands as part of the ArcLight Partners, LLC deal -- high-ranking police officers, dubbed frontline supervisors, gathered to receive training, part of the 2008 federal consent decree mandates, on use of force and citizen complaints.

The ongoing training sessions lasted for four days between both districts -- Monday and Tuesday in St. Thomas, Wednesday and Thursday here -- with roughly 70 officers participating.

The consent decree has been the cause of much consternation at the V.I.P.D. Levied against the department in 2008 by the federal government following a case the feds brought against the G.V.I., the decree calls for a myriad of issues to be rectified, guided and aided by an outside monitor that trains officers on a list of paragraphs that make up the consent decree.

Federal Judge Curtis Gomez is overseeing the consent decree, and hearings are held every quarter to determine progress.

According to monitor Palmer Wilson, the consent decree has over 100 paragraphs that have been broken down into sub paragraphs. Of the one hundred, fifty-three pertains to the operations of the police department, or as Mr. Wilson puts it, "about how the police officers do their jobs." Of the fifty-three paragraphs, two are considered inapplicable to compliance, and of the remaining fifty-one paragraphs, the V.I.P.D. is in compliance with 31 -- leaving 20 more paragraphs before the V.I.P.D. could get out of the consent decree.

St. Croix Police Chief Winsbut McFarlande sees the consent decree as an opportunity to move forward and strengthen the bounds between the community and the police department.

"We can't focus on what got us into the consent decree; the focus is how do we get out. How do we move forward in making the police department the best police department ever to serve this community, and making it second to none so that the public could see the department as an organization that they trust, individuals that they respect, and individuals that are there to serve their community," said Chief McFarlande said.

According to Mr. Wilson, the V.I.P.D. must come into compliance during the first week in August with paragraphs 60 and 72. But Police Commissioner Delroy Richards said recently that he would seek an extension because while progress has been made, the force needed more time.

"They have a plan in place where all the parties work together -- U.S. D.O.J., V.I.P.D. and the monitor," said Mr. Wilson. The parties submitted the agreed upon document as a motion to the court, which the court has excepted. "That's what the court is going to hold them to. That plan requires them to come into compliance paragraphs 60 and 72," he added.

Asked for a timeline as to when the V.I.P.D. would come into compliance with all the consent decree mandates if it follows and passes the remaining paragraphs, Mr. Wilson said he could not say for sure, stating that it depends on the force.

"It's a hard thing to call because it's up to them," he said. Mr. Wilson said police sometimes get intimidated by the consent decree because it calls for multiple reports when an action is taken by an officer. But Chief McFarlane said police should not use the consent decree as an excuse not to perform effectively as officers, because the reports are not to incriminate, but rather to simply give an account of what took place.

It's a notion that Mr. Wilson agreed with. He gave analogy of a reporter who had attended journalism school, gained employment at a media house, given some assignments before going out on the field and performed extremely well. "Then you put them out on their own and all of a sudden you have all this crappy stuff. Then you say, 'What

happened here?' It's the same thing," Mr. Wilson said. He revealed that V.I.P.D. officers "perform incredibly well on the homework, A- and B+. Yet the reports that we look at still have mistakes on them."

He added: "The ability to do it is there. Now, they'll argue with you that they don't have enough staff, and that they have a lot of other work to do and that they don't have enough time and that's why they're making mistakes -- and that may very well be the case. But we haven't assessed that so I can't tell you whether that's accurate or not."

See the latest consent decree report [here](#).

Feature Image: A monitor speaks to V.I.P.D. officers during a training session on Thursday. (Credit: Ernice Gilbert, VIC)

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