

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Acting Governor Potter Issues Statement On Gun Violence: 'We Need To Save Young People From Themselves'

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ST. CROIX -- Not wanting to appear aloof from the gun violence that has steadily plagued the Virgin Islands this year, with the most recent flareup being on this island over the weekend, Lieutenant Governor Osbert Potter, in his capacity as acting governor while Governor Kenneth Mapp is away, issued a statement that touches on multiple issues relative to the violence, including the steady and continuous work of local and federal law enforcement, residents' responsibility to report what they know to police, and the involvement of the faith-based community in healing the islands.

"I strongly believe that there is always someone who knows something regarding all of the incidents of violence that continue to hold our community hostage." Mr. Potter said. "It is becoming way too common now for parents and grandparents to be burying their children and grandchildren."

The weekend deaths bring the territory's total to 37, with 24 involving guns in St. Thomas, another deemed an altercation and yet another as a vehicular homicide. St. Croix's total is 12, with 10 being gun deaths and two victims who died when their moped was [struck by a truck](#), and [one vehicular homicide](#) in St. John.

Mr. Potter also addressed the apparent disregard for life by many of the territory's youth, adding that a collective effort must be employed to save them.

"As a community, we are finding ourselves in the middle of a period where many of the young men in our community have absolutely no regard for life and as such proceed in an extremely reckless fashion where escalated gunplay has become the order of the day. Our fight to save our community from the paralyzing effects of the continuous vicious acts of violence. Simultaneously, [it's] also a fight for us to save the young men of our community from themselves," he said.

The statement says Mr. Potter has held preliminary meetings with the faith-based community to identify ways that they can work with the administration and together develop a strategy to deal with criminal activity.

"We must attack this problem of illegal guns, the lawlessness of the young men that engage in this outrageous gunplay and just the self-destruction of the young men in our community on many fronts. We must invite the pastors from the many churches in this community to come and sit at the table and share [their] ideas and the approaches that the religious community, through their congregations, can do to help remedy this vexing problem," he said.

Mr. Potter says he agrees with the notion of "saving young people from themselves," one neighborhood at a time. The statement also says that the acting governor is in support of assisting neighborhoods in organizing neighborhood pride groups and strengthening young people's mental approach to each other.

He recognized the Smith Bay Community Action Foundation as such an example. The group provides crime watch initiatives; beautification of neighborhoods; assisting families in need; and the restoration of pride.

"We must adjust the mindset of our young men at a very early age, teaching them the value and respect for life, their own lives, as well as others," Mr. Potter concluded.

Feature Image: [Police investigate](#) a crime scene across from the Sunny Isle Shopping Center mid-May. (Ernice Gilbert, VIC)