

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bill Requiring All Firearms To Be Registered At VI Ports Of Entry Now Law

Crime / **Published On August 01, 2016 10:39 PM /**

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Governor Kenneth Mapp has signed into law a measure [requiring all guns coming into the territory](#) be registered at ports of entry -- including sea and land.

The bill's sponsor, Senator Tregenza A. Roach, says it was forged based on complaints by Virgin Islands Police Department officials, who argued that weapons that are not registered eventually fall into the wrong hands and cannot be tracked.

Mr. Roach, who said he has a "growing concern" for the escalation of gun violence in the territory, added that he hoped the new law would have a "profound effect" on the tracking of firearms in the Virgin Islands.

"I am very troubled by the recent loss of lives in the territory. Most of these individuals are between the ages of 17 and 25. They have yet to reap the benefits of living and thriving in our island community and reaching their full potential," he said.

Speaking at a press conference held this morning in St. Croix, Police Commissioner Delroy Richards said most of the weapons that come into the islands are brought legally, but because of what he called an "honor system," where gun owners are left to register their weapons locally based on goodwill, the weapons are freely brought in and sold on the streets.

The new law, if implemented, would go a long way in stemming the flow of these weapons and hence criminal activity, police officials argued during a recent Senate hearing.

"This measure has gathered momentum since it gained unanimous support from my colleagues and now the action of the governor making it law," Mr. Roach said.

The law calls for at least three government agencies — Department of Planning and Natural Resources, V.I.P.D. and the V.I. Port Authority to collaborate in an effort to ensure the law's enforcement. And it mandates proper signage at the territory's ports directing gun owners to location of registration; what is required as a gun holder in the territory; and the penalties of not abiding by the law's demands.

Failure to register, Mr. Roach said, would be a felony, with the law leaving in place penalties already in V.I. Code.

The bill was supported by the entire Senate, with all legislators signing on as co-sponsors, according to Mr. Roach.