

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Focuses On Eliminating Drug Trafficking To Reduce Violent Crimes In Territory At HIDTA Board Meeting

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ST. THOMAS -- Government House here was the location of the executive board meeting of the Puerto Rico/U. S. Virgin Islands High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Program (HIDTA) meeting on Wednesday, Government House has made known via press release.

According to the release, Governor Kenneth Mapp and HIDTA Director Michel Gottlieb -- [who heads the program at the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy](#) -- jointly welcomed over 50 participants to the meeting. The HIDTA program is a national

model for facilitating coordination and cooperation among federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies in the effort to combat drug-related safety and health consequences.

Government House said the governor, in his opening remarks, reminded the audience of his commitment to fighting crime in the Virgin Islands -- much of which Mr. Mapp says is tied to local drug trafficking and drug transshipping -- by making resources available and removing interagency barriers. The governor requested those from the participating agencies to utilize all available resources to improve crime fighting efforts and seek initiatives that would incorporate the Puerto Rico/Virgin Islands territory as one.

In recapping some local efforts that have been made, Mr. Mapp spoke of Bill No. 31-0383 that he approved on July 30, [pertaining to the registry of firearms](#), which requires gun owners to declare firearms at local ports immediately upon entry. "There is no more waiting period," Mr. Mapp said.

The bill provides a necessary means for the government to track firearms and guns entering the territory. Any person wishing to bypass this requirement can be apprehended for criminal violation of our laws.

The governor also indicated that he was willing to look at establishing security between interisland travel to prevent the movement of firearms already in the territory. "We need more assertiveness for those that deal in guns, drugs, and violent crimes," he said, speaking to all agencies present at the meeting.

When he addressed the group of agencies, Mr. Gottlieb noted improvements at the Office of National Drug Control Policy, the tearing down of agency silos to improve communications and effectiveness, and increased funding for specific trafficking-related initiatives such as human, drug, arms, and money laundering. He also indicated that funds from the HIDTA program were being readily used and that additional funding would become available. Mr. Gottlieb also thanked the agency heads for their participation in the HIDTA program and recognized that participation was in addition to their normal agency job responsibilities.

Several agencies such as the U.S. Coast Guard, VIPD and V.I. National Guard made presentations and provided outcomes of closed cases, equipment updates, strategy improvements and training initiatives, according to Government House.

In an outstanding example of a major multi-agency operation, ICE/HIDTA Operation Lost Paradise, 15 people were arrested for drug trafficking and money laundering on December 23, 2015. Several national and local agencies collaborated to aggressively focus its efforts on investigating the money laundering schemes that allowed the criminals to exploit the financial infrastructure to bankroll their activities while they enjoyed the assets produced by their illicit activity.

At the center of all organized crime is the money, and agencies follow the money trail to disable criminal activities and seize assets. This results in the dismantling of transnational criminal organizations, slowing the sale of drugs and related criminal activity, according to Government House.

The PR/USVI HIDTA Executive Board is a collaboration of territorial and federal law enforcement agencies.

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