

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Signs Contract With National Network Of Safe Communities In 'Bold' Effort To Curb Gang Violence

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ST. THOMAS -- Governor Kenneth Mapp has signed a contract between the Government of the Virgin Islands on behalf of the Virgin Islands Police Department and the Research Foundation of the City of New York, on behalf of John Jay College National Network for Safe Communities, for technical and strategic assistance as it relates to reducing gang violence in the territory, Government House announced late Monday.

In March, Police Commissioner Delroy Richards told The Consortium that the effort was a bold strategy of the Mapp administration to eliminate the decadeslong high level of criminal activity that has plagued the territory.

“We are planning on bringing them to the territory for a while,” Mr. Richards said, although he could not reveal the cost of the contract since negotiations at the time were underway, and Monday’s press release was void of said details. “With the level of violence that we have here in the territory, you’ve got to try everything to normalize the situation.”

Mr. Richards also revealed that the effort was one initiated by Governor Kenneth Mapp, and that the program’s project manager would come from Government House.

“It’s going to involve several other commissioners as well,” Mr. Richards added. “You have to involve everybody in order for the effort to be successful, including Dept. of Labor, Human Services — it’s a broad-based effort that must involve the community. And we’re calling it one of our bold initiatives, because we have to stop this cycle one way or the other.”

And Mr. Richards said Dr. David Hall, president of the University of the Virgin Islands, will be involved as well, as education plays a critical role in curbing violence. “It’s going to help the young folks of this territory,” he said.

The service contract is to provide technical assistance to the government and develop and implement strategies that would reduce gang violence within the territory. Additionally, the data collected regarding the cause of violence in the Virgin Islands will be reviewed and, based on findings, direct and remote technical assistance will be provided to guide the intervention, group violence research and preparation of strategies, according to the release.

In addition, the research foundation will coordinate National Network Working Sessions and Peer Exchange Workshops. These workshops will be completed over four quarters and will focus on a range of topics that will be developed to assist the Police Department in establishing sustainable violence reduction strategies in the Virgin Islands.

The NNSC supports jurisdictions implementing strategic interventions to reduce violence and community disorder. These strategies combine the best of law enforcement and community-driven approaches to improve public safety, minimize arrests and incarceration, enhance police legitimacy, and rebuild relationships between law enforcement and distressed communities, according to a description on the organization’s [website](#).

The National Network’s strategies operate along these guiding principles:

- First do no harm
- Strengthen communities’ capacity to prevent violence
- Enhance legitimacy
- Offer help to those who want it
- Get deterrence right

First do no harm

Criminal justice is strong medicine: it can help, but applied too heavily or in the wrong way, it can hurt. It’s now clear that too many incarcerations, aggressive, disrespectful policing, and other missteps can damage individuals, families, and communities and

undermine relationships between neighborhoods and law enforcement. Law enforcement should do its work in ways that do not cause that harm.

Strengthen communities' capacity to prevent violence

Community norms and actions – not law enforcement – do most of the work of crime control. Community members can establish expectations for nonviolence and intervene directly with the few people at the highest risk for violent victimization or offending. Direct communication through “call-ins,” “custom notifications,” and other practical steps can focus and amplify community crime control. Using this approach strengthens neighborhoods and keeps people out of jail.

Enhance legitimacy

Most people obey the law because it's the right thing to do, not because they're afraid of being arrested. Even criminals follow the law most of the time. Communities need to see law enforcement, especially the police, as fair, respectful, and on their side. Police should conduct themselves in ways that model their caring and respect for the communities they serve. Where legitimacy goes up, crime goes down.

Offer help to those who want it

Many of the people at highest risk for violent victimization or offending do not like how they are living and want a way out. Communities should meet them where they are and do everything possible to support them.

Get deterrence right

When law enforcement needs to act, it's usually best to let offenders know that enforcement is coming, so they can stop their offending, rather than to arrest, prosecute, and incarcerate them. The creative use of existing law, combined with direct communication with high-risk people, can make deterrence work and head off both violence and actual enforcement.

Use enforcement strategically when arrest, prosecution, and incarceration are necessary. Law enforcement should use them as sparingly and tactically as possible. Profligate enforcement can have terrible collateral consequences, alienate communities, and undermine legitimacy. Law enforcement should apply the minimum that is compatible with ensuring public safety.

Network for Safe Communities was launched in 2009 by the Center for Crime Prevention and Control at John Jay College of Criminal Justice under the direction of David Kennedy. The network model has shown that violence in neighborhoods can be greatly decreased using this model.

The release also addressed recent calls by Senator Janette Millin Young that the governor put aside what she said were their differences, and sign into law a bill calling for a comprehensive study of violence and public health. The governor did not add any new narrative to his reasoning for vetoing the measure, but instead included a line from a veto message that his administration forwarded to Senate President Neville James in July.

"I have vetoed Bill No. 31-0005, an act providing for a Virgin Islands comprehensive violence and public health study. This measure while well intended, is convoluted and simply, poorly written. Yes, I can sign it into law and then ignore it, but I am forced to veto it because it includes mandatory time lines for the delivery of reports. The measure as written cannot be accomplished. The Legislature provided no resources to effectuate the work and studies it is mandating. The bill states, "The Department of Health shall avail itself of funding made available through federal grants". The author of this measure cannot be serious," Mr. Mapp wrote.

In conclusion, Mr. Mapp said his administration is dedicated to identifying resources, both public and private that can be used to help engage the youth and keep them on the path to a good education that will lead to better jobs and brighter futures. He added that a partnership with a successful program that is already getting results in fighting gang violence will go a long way to achieving these goals here in the Virgin Islands.