

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Commissioner Richards To Officers: 'You Can't Budget On Overtime'

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ST. THOMAS -- The Virgin Islands Police Department has drastically reduced its overtime work hours, a move that came in light of the territory's financial crisis, and was ordered by Governor Kenneth Mapp in an effort to keep the government operational.

But there has been talk of officers' morale taking a dip following the action, as many have depended on overtime pay to meet their needs. Some even took out mortgages based on the assurance that overtime dollars would continue coming in. However, in an interview with The Consortium on Tuesday morning, Police Commissioner Delroy Richards said depending on overtime to set one's budget was a bad strategy. He also reminded officers that the directive to reduce overtime work preceded his tenure.

"I have said to the officers that you must begin to budget yourself not just simply on overtime, because overtime is not guaranteed. You must begin to budget yourself off the salary that you're being paid," Mr. Richards said. Aside from government financial constraints, Mr. Richards said there was a need to control overtime at the V.I.P.D. to show fiscal responsibility. "Not just someone walking into the zone and clocking in, and nobody knows what he or she is doing," he said. "And then they rack up this enormous amount of overtime, and the productivity can't be justified."

The commissioner said overtime would not be eliminated altogether, as such a move would affect the force's job of protecting the Virgin Islands. "But what we are saying is that the overtime that's being paid, there must be supported justification for those overtimes to be paid by this government," Mr. Richards said.

On Tuesday, The Virgin Islands Consortium [published a document that it had obtained](#) detailing a directive from Mr. Richards calling for deep cuts in the force's overtime structure.

Officers with an annually salary of \$40,000 and under will see their biweekly overtime work cut to 16 hours; those making between \$40,001 – \$55,000 annually, will receive 14 hours of biweekly overtime; officers with an annual salary of \$55,001 – \$60,000, will receive 12 hours of overtime work on a biweekly basis; those working for between \$60,001 – \$65,000 annually, will receive 10 hours of biweekly overtime; and those making \$65,001 and over, will receive 8 hours biweekly overtime work.

The drastic reduction in overtime for officers is the V.I.P.D.'s way of "circumventing" having to layoff or furlough employees, according to the document. In light of this, the document added that all "exceptional circumstances overtime must be approved by the deputy chief, chief or a higher ranking authority prior to working overtime." It says captains, lieutenants and commanders will not be allowed to work overtime hours on holidays without prior approval from one of the above mentioned authorities.

The move could affect the V.I.P.D.'s crime-fighting efforts, and may disrupt a positive streak on St. Croix, which has experienced only one homicide in 2017. In a recent interview with The Consortium following a [deadly shooting incident in St. Thomas](#), Mr. Richards said the force was doing its best with its limited resources, stating that the V.I.P.D. lacked the manpower to "put officers on every corner."

But on Tuesday, the commissioner said the efforts to cut cost at the V.I.P.D. would not affect operations, as all actions, moving forward, must be justified. Giving an example, he said, "If we need to have 10 police officers on the street, and it requires that overtime be paid for those 10 police officers, all I'm saying is that we must be able to justify the payment to 10 officers based on our deployment strategy. We're not just simply going to say, 'okay, 10 officers are on the streets and we don't know what kind of overtime they're making.'"

He said the force would ensure that adequate coverage remains a priority to deter criminal acts. "But we must be able to justify the monies that we're spending and the payments that we're making in overtime. That's all I'm saying. We must be held accountable with the monies that we spend and pay."

"I know you're hearing folks saying saying, 'well, I have a lot of expenses, I have a high mortgage,' or 'I have this to pay and I have that to pay.' But you can't budget on overtime because overtime is not a guarantee; overtime is based on need," Mr. Richards stressed. "Don't give me that excuse that because it is cut, that you're going have officers life at stake or the community's safety being compromised, because that is far from the truth," Mr. Richards concluded.

Feature Image: V.I.P.D. Officers [at a crime scene](#) near the St. Croix Central High School in September, 2015. (Credit: Ernice Gilbert, VIC)

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