

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Nine Federal Law Enforcement Officers Receive Commissions As USVI Peace Officers

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ST. THOMAS -- Nine federal law enforcement officers received commissions as Virgin Islands Peace Officers today after attending an orientation on Virgin Islands history and culture at the Police Training Academy on St. Thomas, Virgin Islands Attorney General Claude Earl Walker announced. Commissions were awarded to three agents from the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), three from the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) and three from Homeland Security Investigations (HSI).

The announcement represents part of Governor Kenneth Mapp's vision to [strengthen ties between local and federal law enforcement](#), as the administration continues to build on its crime-fighting efforts.

“Today, we have created a much closer bond with our federal law enforcement partners by granting them commissions to serve as Virgin Islands Peace Officers,” Mr. Walker said. “This is a historic day in the territory because this is the first time that commissions have been granted since the Legislature passed the law making this possible. The Legislature enacted a law granting such powers to federal law enforcement officers, provided that they attend orientation on VI culture and law conducted by the Attorney General’s office. Agents receiving their commissions now have authorization to enforce local criminal laws, including the power to make arrests for violation of Virgin Islands laws, in addition their federal police powers.”

The training was planned by Mr. Walker, in conjunction with Acting U.S. Attorney Joycelyn Hewlett and V.I.P.D. Commissioner Delroy Richards. Mr. Walker, Ms. Hewlett and St. Thomas-St. John Police Chief Jason Marsh were present at the orientation ceremony.

During the ceremony, Glen “Kwabena” Davis, a noted Virgin Islands historian and cultural icon, highlighted significant aspects of Virgin Islands’ history and culture.

“We are a people who have made quite an impact on the world by virtue of the number of people who have passed through here,” Mr. Davis told the gathering, as he recited a chronology of events – which began circa 1200 up to the 1970s – that shaped the Territory’s history and culture.

“It should not have taken so long for local police powers to be conferred upon you,” Mr. Walker said. “With these commissions, you now have full authority, as Virgin Islands Peace Officers to go out and enforce Virgin Islands local laws. So, I encourage you to use this status to proactively fight crime in the territory.”

An act of the Virgin Islands Legislature, Title 23 Virgin Islands Code § 3, enacted on Sept. 17, 2012, has granted authority to the commissioner of the Virgin Islands Police Department to issue commissions as Virgin Islands Peace Officers to certain federal law enforcement officers of certain federal agencies. The Legislation provides that law enforcement officers of the following federal agencies may be commissioned as Virgin Islands peace officers – F.B.I.; D.E.A.; U.S. Customs and Border Protection; Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms; U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement; U.S. Marshals Services; and U.S. Coast Guard.

The U.S. Attorney’s Office, the V.I. Attorney General’s Office and the V.I.P.D. entered into a written Memorandum of Understanding on the procedures to be followed on the issuance and revocation of commissions and the respective rights and responsibilities of the parties. A federal law enforcement officer who is granted a commission is recognized and authorized to act as a Virgin Islands Peace Officer to enforce local laws in the Virgin Islands, including the power to make arrests for violation of Virgin Islands laws. Any federal law enforcement officer granted a commission may use any reasonable force which the officer reasonably believes to be necessary to defend himself, or another person, from bodily harm, while making a lawful arrest.

In addition, reasonable force may also be used, when necessary, to arrest any felon fleeing from justice, when the officer reasonably believes either that the fleeing felon poses a threat of death or serious physical harm to the officer or others or that the fleeing

felon has committed a crime involving the infliction or threatened infliction of serious physical harm to another person.

A similar exercise is also being planned for federal officers in the St. Croix district.

“We are near completion of plans to conduct a similar orientation very shortly in the district of St. Croix so that our federal law enforcement partners in that district may also receive peace officer status,” Mr. Walker said.