

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Calls Press Conference For Monday; McFarland Expected To Be Named Territorial Chief

Crime / **Published On July 21, 2017 11:17 PM /**

Staff **July 21, 2017**



Winsbut McFarland

ST. THOMAS -- Government House late Friday issued a release inviting the media to a press conference to be held at Government House here on Monday, where the governor, among other important discussions, is expect to announce changes in the Virgin Islands Police Department that will see current St. Croix Police Chief Winsbut McFarland being appointed as territorial chief of police.

"Governor Kenneth E. Mapp has announced a news conference scheduled for 10:30 a.m. July 24, 2017 at Government House, St. Thomas to report on his recent trip, address issues related to the Virgin Islands Police Department and provide an update on capital projects," reads the invite.

The Consortium [on Wednesday](#) learned of the pending changes, with Police Commissioner Delroy Richards refusing to confirm or deny that Chief McFarland would be named territorial chief, stating instead that "we'll be considering restructuring within the police department from a management and operational standpoint, I know the governor intends to make a release on that."

The invite comes on the same day that a [double homicide incident](#) occurred here. The administration has been struggling to contain the rampant violence in St. Thomas, whose gun-related homicides have been steady since January.

The plan to make Chief McFarland territorial chief has been in the making for months now, The Consortium learned. Chief McFarland, whose responsibilities will surge more than two-fold upon taking the position, will crisscross the islands and attempt to implement strategies proven to work on St. Croix in St. Thomas.

As of Friday, 10 regular homicides had been reported on St. Croix for 2017, and 16 regular homicides on St. Thomas during the same time. When vehicular homicides are factored in, the count climbs to 31 territory-wide, to include [Tuesday night's vehicular homicide](#), according to information provided by Mr. Richards.

While the commissioner did not speak on Chief McFarland's new position, he said territorial police chief isn't a new position. Mr. Richards himself was a territorial police chief in the 90s, which he retired from in 1994. Following his tenure, Novelle Francis and Jose Garcia were territorial chiefs as well.

The commissioner, who began his current role in 2015, expressed support for such moves, stating that having territorial chiefs "enhances the capabilities of the department, and you're maintaining a sense of consistency in the territory." Speaking on past appointments of territorial chiefs, the commissioner said officials were once worried that the St. Thomas-St. John and the St. Croix police operations were running divergent strategies, and moved to unify the departments with one person at the top.

"Some folks would say, 'Well, what works well in one island might not work well in the other,' but I disagreed with that. I've always said that it's one police department and the policies have to be consistent throughout the territory," Mr. Richards said.

The commissioner in June 2016 announced [that he had fired](#) former St. Croix Police Chief Arthur Hector, Sr. and St. Thomas Police Chief Darren Foy. The changes came at a time when violent crime had been unrelenting in the territory, with gun crimes being reported in both districts every week. Chief McFarland and current St. Thomas Police Chief Jason Marsh were given acting chief roles at the time.

The decision to remove the former chiefs came with careful deliberation, Mr. Richards said during the announcement. "We obviously assess the V.I.P.D.'s organizational structure and decided that it was time to make some modifications, and those modifications were done," he said [last year](#). "I think that whenever decisions are made,

they are made after careful deliberation that the department needs to move in a different direction.”

What role current St. Thomas Chief Marsh will play in the new structure remains to be seen. And whether or not Chief McFarland’s lauded efforts in St. Croix will prove effective on a territory-wide scale, will takes months — if not years — to determine.

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