

The Virgin Islands Consortium

VIPD To Implement Use Of License Plate Readers And Facial Recognition System; Relationship With NYPD Grows

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ST. THOMAS -- Governor Kenneth Mapp, once a police officer at the New York City Police Department, has been building a strong relationship with the N.Y.P.D., with multiple police officers within various arms of the Virgin Islands Police Department receiving training at the New York Police Academy. In fact, a group of V.I.P.D. officers recently returned from the N.Y.P.D., with a new batch -- from the investigations bureau, according to the governor -- set to travel to New York for training next month.

In August, the governor will host the N.Y.P.D. commissioner, where the relationship between the two departments will be formally explained to residents of the territory. Mr. Mapp and the N.Y.P.D. commissioner will discuss initiatives between the departments, how the N.Y.P.D. will continue in its role of mentoring the V.I.P.D. in terms of strengthening its capacity and ensuring that training and professional development continue, which Mr. Mapp says is part of the V.I.P.D.'s strategy to exit the consent decree. The end goal, Mr. Mapp said, is to have a "full fledged modern police department."

The modernization will include the roll out of a new technology infrastructure, a beneficiary of which will include the use of license plate readers and facial recognition systems, "as we try to ensure that we keep track of folks who are committing crime in the Virgin Islands, and ensuring that they are brought to justice in a rapid way," the governor said. A timeline for the roll out was not given.

Mr. Mapp also announced the appointment of Winsbut McFarland and territorial chief of police at the Monday press conference as part of his administration's plan to restructure the force.

"Chief McFarland will assume all operational command of all of the islands and districts in the Virgin Islands," the governor said.

Former St. Thomas Police Chief Jason Marsh was named the deputy commissioner for the Professional Standards Bureau of the V.I.P.D. The Professional Standards Bureau is the outreach arm of the territory's consent decree in the District Court, relating to professional standards within the police department.

"I believe there's high expectations in the territory and I am very confident that the department will benefit immensely from the knowledge and experience that both of you have brought to the table," V.I.P.D. Commissioner Delroy Richards said of both appointments.

Chief McFarland, after thanking his family, the governor, police officers and the community, promised to do all in his power to ensure the community's safety. "Together we could make a difference in this community," he said.

Mr. Mapp told Chief McFarland that he has complete leeway to establish his department. "We want you to spend some time and put your team together," the governor said, adding that Chief McFarland should choose who he believes is best suited to carry out his mandate.

As of today, 10 gun-related homicides have been reported on St. Croix for 2017, and 14 gun-related homicides on St. Thomas during the same time. When vehicular homicides are factored in, the count climbs to 31 territory-wide, according to information provided by Mr. Richards.