

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Investigation Unearths Rampant Sexual Assault, Sex For Employment And Fraud At V.I. National Guard; Mapp 'Disturbed' By Findings

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ST. THOMAS -- Governor Kenneth Mapp dropped bombshell news regarding the Virgin Islands National Guard (V.I.N.G.) during a Government House press conference on Tuesday, revealing that following a yearlong investigation by the National Guard Bureau (N.G.B.) which is still ongoing, rampant sexual assault, harassment, assault, sexual intercourse for employment (quid pro quo) and fraud were found to be commonplace at the Virgin Islands National Guard for years, and that course-resetting changes at the organization were underway.

Without mincing words, the governor -- joined at one point by V.I.N.G. Adjutant General Deborah Howell, Deputy Director of the Army National Guard, Major General Timothy McKeithen, and Special Assistant to the Director of the Army National Guard, Brigadier General John C. Boyd -- said he was troubled by the findings of the investigators, which was relayed to the governor on July 24.

"I have read the report in its entirety, and I am disturbed by what I read," Mr. Mapp said. He thanked Adjt-Gen. Howell for taking up the matter, as well as the N.G.B. for its report and swift response. "I accept the findings contained in the report, and I accept the assistance and the federal resources committed to restore the Virgin Islands National Guard to an optimal level of performance," Mr. Mapp said. He gave Adjt-Gen. Howell his full backing "to do what's required."

The governor seemed to have been affected the most by the portion in the report that described how many would-be V.I.N.G. members were treated by V.I. National Guard recruiters.

"To be candid, the climate at the Virgin Islands National Guard, particularly as it relates to nepotism and sexual assault has been so egregious that when young females have been recruited or attempted to be recruited into the National Guard, recruiters have passed them around as if they are properties before they would allow them into the system," Mr. Mapp said, referring to the would-be female National Guard members being coerced into having sex with multiple Guardsmen before they could join V.I.N.G. "Some young ladies just decided that they no longer had any interest in joining the Virgin Islands National Guard."

The governor said the investigation has cleared the way for the government to reach out to the affected individuals. He appealed to those who turned away because of the harassment, to come forward. "We will provide you support services for this horrible experience," he said.

The investigation has caused some to lose their jobs, Mr. Mapp made known. "[Others](#) have [faced](#) and more will face criminal sanctions," said the governor. He said senior officers and other command structures will be transferred to the V.I. National Guard from abroad to assist Adjt-Gen. Howell in reversing the deficiencies, while some members of the local National Guard will be transferred the Department of Defense in Virginia for retraining. "Others have been asked to retire and are making their way out," Mr. Mapp revealed.

The governor sought to reassure the community that Adjt-Gen. Howell as well as the N.G.B., were working to ensure that members of V.I.N.G. can operate in an environment free from sexual harassment and sexual assault. He said the Guard was also strengthening its equal opportunity employment policies and procedures.

Adjt-Gen. Howell, noting the gravity of the investigators' findings, acknowledged the severity of the matter and vowed to affect change. However, she spoke sanguinely about the Guard, lauding the organization as the territory's best defense, whose men and women are willing and able to provide service to the territory -- and the nation -- when called upon.

Mirroring the governor's strategy during his [last State of the Territory Address](#), where Mr. Mapp used Charles Dickens's book, "A Tale of Two Cities" to describe the territory's position at the time, Adjt-Gen. Howell said, "The Virgin Islands National Guard is enduring the best of times and the worst of times. In spite of, the Virgin Islands National Guard is still the best organization in the Virgin Islands," she said. She admitted that some members of V.I.N.G. do not adhere to principles of military profession and ethics. "Let me remind you that it's only a few, but left unchecked they will destroy our organization," she said.

Adjt-Gen. Howell also announced a long-term, phased approach that she says will bring the V.I. National Guard to the standard it needs to be. The first phase, which is to take place within the next 18 months, will see a surge of National Guard senior officers from abroad taking up key positions locally. They will also help with training as Adjt-Gen. Howell work on preparing locals to fill critical roles overtime. Those resources will be provided by the N.G.B., the adjutant general said.

The second phase, which is to last for five years, will focus on monitoring. The success of monitoring will be supported and determined by the N.G.B., which will track all V.I.N.G. programs. "That way, we don't intend to regress again," Adjt-Gen. Howell said.

The sustenance phase is the last, and it "looks strategically out to the next 20 years," she said. Adjt-Gen. Howell said the press conference was important because the National Guard wanted the right information to get out to the public. It was also necessary to help urge those who have turned away from joining the Guard because of sexual harassment, to come forward with information that may help the investigation. Adjt-Gen. Howell said information about the case could be found at www.vi.ngb.army.mil by clicking a teal-colored ribbon, however at time of writing, the ribbon [was not on the site](#).

According to Major General McKeithen, because the investigation is still ongoing, the report will not be released to the media. He did not rule out the possibility once the investigation is completed, however.

How the investigation started

On July 29, 2016, Adjt-Gen. Howell was contacted by the N.G.B.'s legal office with some damaging information about the V.I. National Guard. The report was made to the N.G.B. by a U.S.V.I. civilian agency, after multiple reports from locals about the behavior at V.I.N.G. Adjt-Gen. Howell, upon her return to the territory, briefed the governor on the matter, and also discussed a path forward. On August 3, 2016, Adjt-Gen. Howell requested assistance from the N.G.B., and an investigation by the N.G.B., Office of Complex Review, was launched into the allegations of sexual assault and sexual harassment among members of the V.I. National Guard. Other allegations included issues regarding the climate of command and the impact of social organizations such as fraternities on the Guard, as well as allegations of irregularities within training, recruitment and operations.

On December 28, 2016, Adjt-Gen. Howell received a preliminary briefing that confirmed many of the allegations and prompted her to commence remediation efforts. On July 13, Adjt-Gen. Howell received a draft copy of a more thorough report, and proceeded to coordinate a formal meeting to brief the governor. On July 24, Mr. Mapp was briefed by

the chief of the N.G.B., General Joseph L. Lengyel, as well as Major Gen. McKeithen.

Optimism on V.I.N.G.'s futur

Even with the governor's displeasure of what was uncovered, he, like Adjt-Gen. Howell, sought to balance the investigators' findings with morale-boosting words about V.I.N.G.

"Despite the information provided today, let there be no doubt that the Virgin Islands National Guard is prepared to respond if called upon for an emergency," Mr. Mapp said. "As governor of these Virgin Islands, I will do what's necessary to ensure that members of the community who want to serve can do so in an environment where they can flourish, and maybe even someday become the adjutant general, state command sergeant major, or function on the national level."