

The Virgin Islands Consortium

U.S. D.O.J Says VIPD Is 85 Percent In Compliance With Consent Decree; No End in Sight

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ST. THOMAS -- The Virgin Islands Police Department (V.I.P.D.) and the United States Department of Justice (D.O.J.), in a joint appearance on Wednesday evening, updated the public on progress made on the territory's march to compliance with the nearly decade-old consent decree.

The consent decree is a cooperative effort between the U.S.V.I., the V.I.P.D. and U.S. D.O.J. that was created to bring a common commitment to Constitutional policing, police integrity, and preventing conduct that deprives persons of rights and privileges secured by the Constitution or federal law.

The consent decree is essentially a commitment to constitutional policing on the part of the V.I.P.D. to systematically change the culture of the department. The agreement's full governing use of force and departmental policies can be viewed [here](#).

During Wednesday's public forum, held at the West Indian Company's administrative building, V.I.P.D. and U.S. D.O.J. officials revealed to the public what they believed to be progress in the V.I.P.D.'s efforts to come into full compliance with the decree.

The public forum was packed with information on what the consent decree represented but produced less data than some had anticipated. Some statistics and figures were revealed about the number of complaints Virgin Islanders filed with the department in visual presentations. Officials did not offer a timeline, or when full compliance would be achieved and failed to break out specific details on the performance officers had on a number of policies in the decree.

According to an independent firm monitoring the department's progress, much of the data absent from the presentations at the forum would have to be accessed in the dozens of quarterly public reports it publishes. Those quarterly reports were not readily available to the public, but can be accessed [here](#).

Officials detailed steps being taken by the V.I.P.D., including developing new policies, training on the new policies, implementation of the new policies, and monitoring.

Jeff Murry, a federal official attached to the U.S. D.O.J.'s [Civil Rights Division: Special Litigation Section](#), announced that the V.I.P.D. had achieved 85 percent compliance with the decree. V.I.P.D. officials admitted that the department had a long way to go before it came into full compliance with the policies outlined in the agreement.

Recently, Senator Janelle K. Sarauw filed a police report [accusing an officer of brandishing a weapon while off duty in an altercation](#). The officer faces punitive action under the consent decree pending a full investigation. "Because of this report, we are required under the consent decree to place her on leave with pay pending the outcome of the investigation," said V.I.P.D. Commissioner Delroy Richards, speaking during the public forum.

Gubernatorial Candidate Soraya Diase Coffelt was in attendance, and along with others, expressed concerns about the amount of cash the territory has paid independent monitors over the course of four years.

Speaking in the forum, Ms. Diase Coffelt said, "We the people should have all the information given the situation, so that there is not this payment of money to outside monitors, and the money that's saved is used for the benefit of the police department."

When pressed on how much money the Government of the Virgin Islands pays [Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson LLP](#) annually for its independent monitoring services, the firm declined to discuss the inquiry further with the public. The independent firm has been working with the V.I.P.D. and the U.S. D.O.J. since 2014.

Assistant Police Commissioner Curtis Griffin, also declined to discuss how much the firm is paid to monitor the V.I.P.D.'s progress; the U.S. D.O.J. also declined to comment on the inquiry.

Mr. Griffin later added that one of the issues officers faced when meeting the requirements of the consent decree for the first two years, was that the V.I.P.D. had to aggressively alter its culture to better serve the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands.

"It took us so long to get here because the department didn't hire a consultant who specialized in consent decrees when the agreement came into effect," Mr. Griffith said. "The implementation requires capacity; there were a lot of years of lowering the hiring standards and lowering other standards that slowed down modern day policies from being implemented."

The V.I.P.D. and U.S. D.O.J. will be hosting similar community forums in St. John and St. Croix later this week. V.I.P.D. officials are encouraging Virgin Islanders to come out and continue the public conversation.

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