

The Virgin Islands Consortium

VIPD Reports 17 Percent Drop In Crime, But Loss Of Officers May Stymie Safety Efforts

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Virgin Islands Police Department (V.I.P.D.) Commissioner Delroy Richards said during a budget hearing held on St. Croix on Thursday, that part one crimes (murder and non-negligent homicide, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, motor vehicle theft, larceny-theft, and arson) dropped by 17 percent between the months of October 2017 to May 2018.

"For Fiscal Year 2018, the period of October 2017 through June 2018, we have recorded 24 homicides [territory-wide]: ten on St. Thomas, [none] on St. John and 14 on St. Croix," Mr. Richards testified. For the same period last year, there were 31 homicides: 20 on St. Thomas, [none] on St. John and 11 on St. Croix."

The department is seeking a Fiscal Year 2019 budget of \$63,924,041.

In 2017, there were 52 homicides territory-wide between January and December: 24 on St. Thomas and 28 on St. Croix, Mr. Richards said. There were no homicides in St. John in 2017, according to the commissioner.

Between October 2017 to June 2018, the V.I.P.D. confiscated 81 illegal firearms: 46 on St. Croix and 35 in the St. Thomas-St. John District. For all of 2017, 179 illegal firearms were confiscated: 103 in the St. Croix District and 76 in the St. Thomas-St. John District, Mr. Richards said.

But as the V.I.P.D. continues to keep the pressure on criminals in an attempt to stave off crimes, it is facing a problem that could stymie the progress made. According to Mr. Richards, many police officers are leaving the force and over will become eligible for retirement in 2019.

"During Fiscal Year 2018, many of our new and experienced officers have separated from the department in both districts. In the St. Thomas-St. John District, 21 have separated, and in the St. Croix District 11 have separated," Mr. Richards said. "In Fiscal Year 2019 in the St. Thomas District, 59 personnel will be eligible to retire. In the St. Croix District, 67 personnel will be eligible to retire and in the next three years, an additional 41 personnel will be eligible to retire territory-wide."

The exodus from the police force, according to the commissioner, has been determined to be noncompetitive salary and changes brought about by a 2015 law that affected officers who were employed as of October 1, 2005. Mr. Richards said the law changed the retirement criteria from 20 years, with no age minimum, to 25 years and age 58. "These changes resulted in officers leaving the department before becoming vested," Mr. Richards said.

With the cause of the separations identified, the commissioner said the force's human resources, recruitment and public information offices are in the process of increasing recruitment efforts by attending career fairs, creating a video, coordinating the placement of recruitment banners at high traffic locations, and working with different radio stations in relaying information to the public relative to the positions.

A major part of the problem is the V.I.P.D.'s new starting salary of \$40,953, which took effect on May 14 of this year. "Negotiations will continue with the Office of Collective Bargaining for members of those bargaining units whose salaries were not adjusted," the commissioner said.

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Feature Image: Police mark areas where shell casings were found during a shooting incident in [September 2015](#). (Ernice Gilbert, VIC)