

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Long-Time Project Safe Neighborhoods Facilitators Represent USVI At National Conference

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Three seasoned Virgin Islands Police Department (VIPD) officers and U.S Attorney Gretchen C.F. Shappert represented the territory at last week's Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) National Conference in Kansas City, Missouri, a release the U.S. Attorney's Office issued Monday has made known.

The conference brought together federal prosecutors and their law enforcement partners from across the nation and included speeches by President Donald Trump, Acting Attorney General Matthew Whitaker, Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, and former Attorney General John Ashcroft, according to the release. The PSN Conference was the first of its kind in eight years and underscores the commitment of the Department

of Justice to reducing violent crime and fostering public safety for all Americans.

Beginning in 2017, all 93 United States Attorneys were directed to implement enhanced violent crime reduction programs that incorporate the lessons learned since the original PSN program launch in 2001 and to develop new strategies to reduce violent crime.

"The goal of the enhanced PSN program is to bring together all levels of law enforcement and community stakeholders to reduce violent crime and make communities safer for everyone," said Shappert. "PSN uses a comprehensive approach to public safety--one that includes prevention, enforcement, and reentry efforts-- while ensuring that federal prosecutors focus on the work they do best: investigating and prosecuting crimes. As federal prosecutors, we intend to bring the full extent of criminal sanctions to bear on violent offenders, deterring future crime, and empowering our law enforcement and community partners to ensure public safety."

The USVI delegation to the PSN National Conference included strong VIPD leadership with considerable experience in community-based policing, the release said. Jacqueline Freeman is the director of the VIPD Crime Prevention Bureau and serves as the chair of the USVI PSN Law Enforcement Planning Commission Board. Ms. Freeman has also worked extensively with the USVI Weed and Seed initiative which assists under-served communities to identify and leverage resources to support public safety, according to the release. During her tenure, she has coordinated annual gang awareness trainings, supervised development of the highly acclaimed documentary "Gangs in Paradise", worked with law enforcement and community partners to improve communication, and facilitated numerous community discussions of public safety issues.

Edith Christopher is currently assigned as the Community Oriented Police (COP) Officer in the Grove Place Weed and Seed site on St. Croix, which is part of the VIPD Crime Prevention Unit. Ms. Christopher has conducted extensive anti-bullying trainings in the schools and the community and has worked to expand the Neighborhood Watch Program on St. Croix.

Captain Sandra Colbourne, a 30-year veteran with VIPD, is part of the Management and Supervision Team responsible for the VIPD Consent Decree implementation. She also serves as co-chair of the USVI PSN Law Enforcement Planning Commission Board during her years with VIPD. Captain Colbourne has worked with PSN and the National Network for Safe Communities (NNSC) to identify grant resources and funding streams which support community outreach efforts. She has also been instrumental in facilitating constructive dialog between law enforcement and vulnerable communities in St. Thomas and St. John.

"The territory is fortunate to have such dedicated and experienced VIPD representatives who are committed to public safety and to the PSN initiative," Shappert said. "The training we received in Kansas City will enable us to incorporate effective law enforcement strategies and the principles of PSN into our crime-fighting efforts in the USVI. We recognize that community buy-in is essential to our success, and we intend to increase our community engagement."

Feature Image: From left to right: USVI PSN representatives from left to right: Director Jacqueline Freeman, Officer Edith Christopher, U.S. Attorney Gretchen Shappert, and Captain Sandra Colbourne.

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