

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Governor Bryan Will Join V.I.P.D. Officials Tuesday To Address Surging Crime Situation In Territory

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Governor Albert Bryan will join Acting Police Commissioner Jason Marsh on Tuesday to address the surging violent crimes situation in the U.S. Virgin Islands, Government House announced Monday. The men will speak on ongoing police initiatives to curb the violence, and investigations currently underway on crimes that have already taken place.

The press conference follows five homicides on St. Croix in the first 17 days of 2019, and a shooting in St. Thomas that left three men injured -- an incident that could have easily turned deadly.

The press event, which we will carry live, takes place at the V.I.P.D.'s Wilbur Francis Command in Frederiksted, and is expected to start at 10:00 a.m., according to the release.

Governor Bryan during his first press conference as the territory's leader announcing cabinet heads, took some time to address the crime. "While I assure you that our Virgin Islands Police Department has launched immediate investigations into these incidents and are working to bring those responsible to justice, I also want to assure you that our administration is being proactive in addressing the issues at the root of our persisting problem with violence in our community," he said.

The newly-sworn in governor called on Virgin Islanders to come together and take back their community and to work with law enforcement, both the private sector and nonprofit organizations, as well as with his administration to provide better opportunities for young people and to improve the socioeconomic conditions in the territory, according to the release.

"I want to also underscore the important need for us all, to take greater steps to take back our community. It will take courage and painstaking measures to make the changes we need to address the problems of lawlessness in our neighborhoods, but we can and will if we all step up and do our part," Mr. Bryan said.

He added, "We've had studies, consent decrees, and prayer vigils, but what we need is real action from all corners of our community to protect our young people. We need to improve the socioeconomic standing for many of our families, and to do better in our efforts to offer places of refuge for our young people who believe they are out of alternatives."

Following the fifth homicide incident on St. Croix, Senator Kurt Violet called on Mr. Bryan to declare a state of emergency and to initiate immediately a meeting with the Office of the Attorney General, judicial branch and all local and federal law enforcement agencies. The veteran senator also listed a number of objectives that should be up for discussion during the emergency meeting:

- Temporary reassignment of all Enforcement Officers to Department of Public Safety.
- Increased patrols and visibility in neighborhoods and towns.
- Increase traffic stops.
- Temporary hiring of off-island investigators to increase our investigative capabilities.
- Targeting of high crime areas by using data from shot spotter that record gunshots.
- Develop an enticement program for retired officers to return to duty for a time limited period.
- Establish Global Positioning Systems (GPS) in all police cars.
- Develop a system for citizens to anonymously report someone illegally possessing a firearm.
- Deter loitering in high crime areas and submit requisite legislative change to bolster the loitering law.
- Timely release of crime data (photos, color of car, description, etc.) that will assist in the identification of criminals by the community.

- Speedy prosecution of repeat offenders.
- Development of an anti-gang unit and reestablishment of the special unit.
- Resolution of outstanding cases that await trial.
- Development of a strategic plan to decrease violent crimes.

The Government House release said nothing about the appointment by Mr. Bryan of a permanent police commissioner, an indication that the search was still underway, and the administration was not ready to announce a selection.