

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Editorial | A Call To Park, Walk And Talk

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Staff **February 08, 2019**



This week, the Virgin Islands Police Department will graduate 20 recruits, 18 of whom will join the VIPD as its newest officers. I am honored to welcome my new brothers and sisters in blue to the law enforcement family. We all look forward to your effective and productive careers as you embark on service at the Virgin Islands Police Department, Virgin Islands Fire Services and the Virgin Islands Port Authority. I encourage my fellow law enforcement professionals to lead by example as our newest officers apply the lessons learned over their training to real life in our Virgin Islands streets.

As a young officer, I had the privilege of being mentored by senior officers like Carmen Bastian, Jose Quinones and Lawrence Petersen. I benefited from these officers' wisdom gained over many years of interacting with our people in their communities. These officers

often spoke about walking the beat on foot patrol in the towns and neighborhoods. As a new officer, I did the same – spending many hours on foot in our streets. This allowed me to learn more about our residents, from our youth to the elders, from troublemakers to the troubled. This experience not only shaped my police career but helped me to build real and longstanding relationships with the community.

While I know it's not possible to put an officer on every corner, I implore Acting Commissioner Marsh and the leadership of the VIPD to require these new officers to spend time walking our streets – to park, walk and talk. Across the country, police departments are returning to foot patrols as they explore ways to strengthen their officers' bonds with the community. In fact, a 2016 study by the Police Foundation, aptly titled "Engaging Communities One Step at A Time" critically examines the role of foot patrols as an effective policing strategy. Interestingly, the report noted that, in many communities, squad cars are perceived as a physical barrier to human interactions. I am certain that many of my fellow Virgin Islanders would say the same.

These newest officers are joining the police force at a time when a greater understanding and knowledge of our communities could very well provide the tools needed to close cases and decrease crime. This knowledge can effectively be paired with technology like surveillance cameras and Shot Spotter to support the VIPD's crime fighting efforts. However, this understanding of our community won't be gained driving by in a car, but in walking or even riding bikes or Segways. It depends on our officers being more accessible and approachable to the community that they have sworn to protect and serve.

Submitted on Thursday by: Senator Novelle Francis