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Bryan to Introduce Bill Requiring Travelers to Declare Weapons and Ammunition Before Traveling to USVI

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Guns confiscated at airports across the US by TSA By. TSA

Governor Albert Bryan is preparing to send a bill to the Legislature that would require persons coming into the territory to declare weapons and ammunition that they may be carrying before embarking on a flight to the USVI. The move is another step in leaders' efforts to tame the incessant gun violence in the Virgin Islands, with the USVI experiencing [38 homicides](#) through August, a staggering yet familiar count for a territory of just over 100,000 people.

The legislation goes to the heart of what has been a concern for law enforcement: undeclared weapons make their way into the territory through ports of entry, then to the streets and eventually to be used during criminal activities.

A similar measure was [introduced](#) by then-Senator Tregenza Roach — now serving as lieutenant governor — in 2016 and [signed into law](#) by former Governor Kenneth Mapp the same year. The law requires all guns coming into the territory to be registered at ports of entry including sea and land. Mr. Bryan's measure seeks declaration before embarkment to the USVI.

Mr. Roach said at the time that the bill was introduced based on complaints by Virgin Islands Police Department officials, who argued that weapons that are not registered eventually fall into the wrong hands and cannot be tracked.

Mr. Roach, who said at the time he had a “growing concern” for the escalation of gun violence in the territory, added that he hoped the new law would have a “profound effect” on the tracking of firearms in the Virgin Islands.

“I am very troubled by the recent loss of lives in the territory. Most of these individuals are between the ages of 17 and 25,” Mr. Roach said in June 2016. “They have yet to reap the benefits of living and thriving in our island community and reaching their full potential.”

The law calls for at least three government agencies — Department of Planning and Natural Resources, V.I.P.D. and the V.I. Port Authority — to collaborate in an effort to ensure the law’s enforcement. And it mandates proper signage at the territory’s ports directing gun owners to location of registration; what is required as a gun holder in the territory; and the penalties of not abiding by the law’s demands.

In a release issued [earlier this month](#), the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) said its officers detected firearms in carry-on bags at a rate three times higher this past July than the same month in 2019, though passenger volume is significantly lower.

TSA officers detected 15.3 guns per million people last month compared to 5.1 guns per million people screened during July 2019. The rate is particularly alarming, TSA said, given that TSA screened about 75 percent fewer passengers in July 2020, over the previous year’s volume.

“TSA is diligently working to ensure our employees and passengers are safe and secure while traveling during a pandemic, and yet we are noticing a significant increase in loaded firearms coming into checkpoints,” said TSA Administrator David Pekoske. “Travelers must understand that firearms are prohibited items at airports and in the passenger cabins of aircraft. As hard as we are working to mitigate other risks at this time, no one should be introducing new ones.”

The potential Federal civil penalty for an unloaded firearm starts at \$2,050 and it starts at \$4,100 for a loaded gun, TSA made known. The penalty can go up to the current statutory maximum of \$13,669 per violation, depending on the circumstances.

Separately, Mr. Bryan praised the V.I.P.D.'s "V.I. Crime Initiative", a new effort helmed by Police Commissioner Trevor Velinor that has [led to a number of arrests](#).

“This is the kind of proactive police work we are taking to fight the gun violence that has plagued these islands for too long, and I applaud the men and women of the Virgin Islands Police Department and our peace officers for taking the fight to those criminals who terrorize our community,” Mr. Bryan said. “Once again, I am calling on residents to become part of the solution to the problem of gun violence by assisting the police with information. It cannot be said too much: If you see something, say something.”

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