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863 People Have Died Through Homicides From Year 2000 to Date, Commissioner Velinor Says, Reminding that Gun Violence in USVI is Nothing New

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Crime scene By. GETTY IMAGES

Police Commissioner Trevor Velinor revealed to the Consortium Monday afternoon that 863 people from 2001 to date have died through homicides in the territory, a reminder that the problem has persisted in the U.S. Virgin Islands without an effective strategy to stop the incidents for two decades.

The commissioner's interview with the Consortium came after a press briefing the police force held at 11:00 a.m. Monday to address [shootings](#) that took place in St. Thomas over the weekend. The interview also followed a ["no confidence" letter](#) from three police unions addressed to

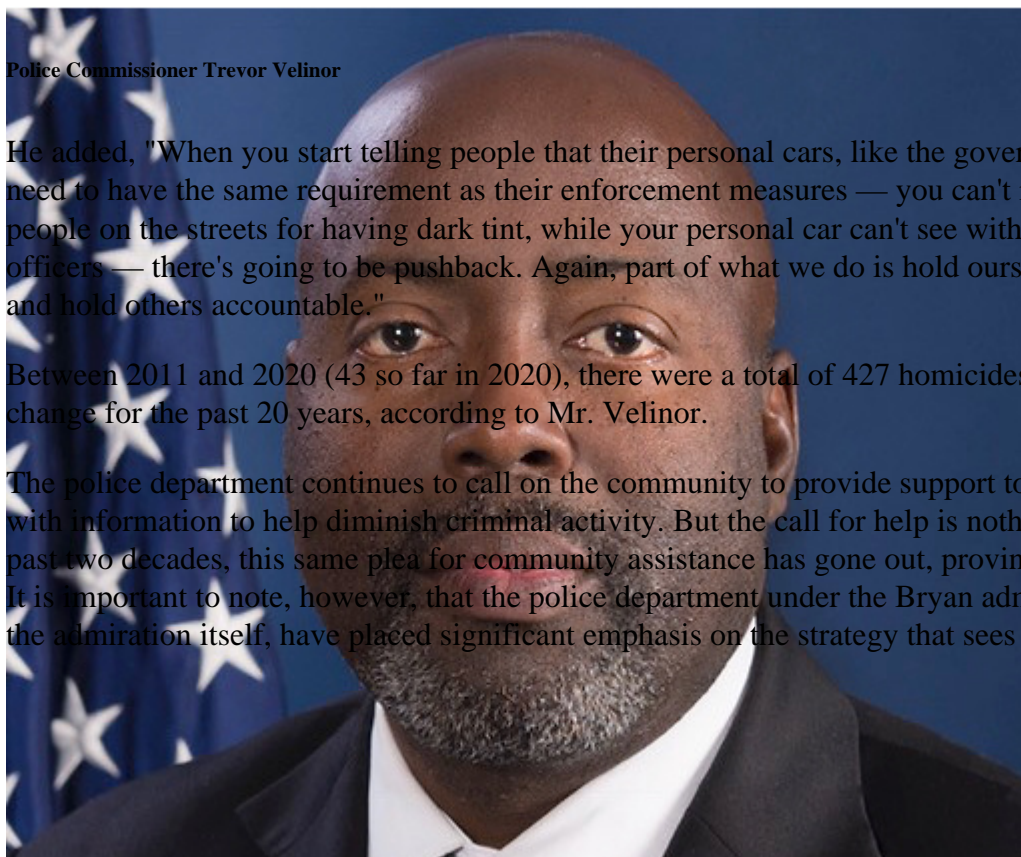
Governor Bryan calling for Mr. Velinor's immediate resignation. The unions are contending that the commissioner has failed to effectively lead the department, pointing to the incessant homicides as proof of his ineffectiveness.

According to Mr. Velinor, between the years 2000 and 2010 there were 436 homicides territory-wide. Here's the breakdown:

- 2000: 18
- 2001: 30
- 2002: 42
- 2003: 29
- 2004: 36
- 2005: 41
- 2006: 42
- 2007: 44
- 2008: 41
- 2009: 54
- 2010: 59

The commissioner wanted the data out in the public as a reminder of how deeply rooted violent crime has been in the U.S. Virgin Islands. During the press briefing, he pushed back against the three unions, arguing that change actions he has implemented were making many within the department uncomfortable.

"From a law enforcement perspective and a leadership perspective, when you hold people accountable, there's always going to be pushback. When you start demanding that people work, demonstrate professionalism, there's going to be pushback. When you start disciplining consistent with the metrics, there's going to be pushback. When you start complying with the consent decree and their demand that everyone adhere to the protocols established, there's going to be pushback. When you start doing right and saying you got to get out your car and walk the beat, and touch the flesh, and take the tints off, there's going to be push back," Mr. Velinor said.



Police Commissioner Trevor Velinor

He added, "When you start telling people that their personal cars, like the government-issued cars need to have the same requirement as their enforcement measures — you can't issue tickets to people on the streets for having dark tint, while your personal car can't see within as police officers — there's going to be pushback. Again, part of what we do is hold ourselves accountable and hold others accountable."

Between 2011 and 2020 (43 so far in 2020), there were a total of 427 homicides — virtually no change for the past 20 years, according to Mr. Velinor.

The police department continues to call on the community to provide support to law enforcement with information to help diminish criminal activity. But the call for help is nothing new; for the past two decades, this same plea for community assistance has gone out, proving to be a hard sell. It is important to note, however, that the police department under the Bryan administration, and the admiration itself, have placed significant emphasis on the strategy that sees residents providing

pertinent information to law enforcement.

During a recent Covid-19 response update, Mr. Bryan said the community has a responsibility to help ascertain safety by reporting wrongdoing. "We have to stand as one people to establish wrong from right and discontinue our silent overlooking of wrong that happens in our community," he [said](#). "Whether it's an illegal horse track, drag racing, prostitution, loitering in places where you don't belong, the illegal numbers game and the gambling houses, trespassing — all these things we have to say no more to as a community."

During Monday's V.I.P.D. press briefing, Mr. Velinor said there hasn't been one recorded occasion where a resident who provided a tip to the V.I.P.D. was negatively impacted. He said this to counter the notion that residents are at risk of retaliation if they provide information to authorities.

During the interview, Mr. Velinor, who was a U.S.-based federal agent with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) before joining the police department, also sought to put into context the reason for his travels outside the territory, as he has been criticized on that issue as well. "Two of my travels were related to my dying brother that I took a weekend for: went up on a Thursday and came back on the Sunday. One just before he passed, the other to attend the funeral," the commissioner explained.

"Now, I have a family in the states, in Florida. My wife works and has not been able to visit since December of last year. Once Covid hit, people are not traveling. Even if I go home I have to maintain a safe distance from my spouse for a period of time," Mr. Velinor said. He said he has only been outside the USVI an accumulative 12 days since taking the job 15 months ago.

Mr. Bryan did not respond to a request for comment regarding the "no confidence" letter from the unions addressed to him.

Mr. Velinor's appointment as police commissioner [in May 2019](#) is part of an agreement between the ATF and the Government of the Virgin Islands under the Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) Mobility Program, which provides for temporary assignment of personnel between the federal and state and local governments, according to Government House. The arrangement is [similar to that of then-Dept. of Health Commissioner Michelle Davis](#), who served under the Mapp administration.