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Dear Editor, Here are 9 Suggestions to Curtail Crime in the U.S. Virgin Islands

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Officers inspect red Honda Civic that was riddled with bullets near Central High School on Saturday, Sept. 5, 2015. By. VI CONSORTIUM

Dear Editor,

Recently one particular family suffered a tragic loss. On Friday October 23, 2020 we gathered to celebrate her life. Let's not let the loss of her life and the other lives be in vain. Children are treasured gifts from God. All adults understand what it takes to raise a child to be positive and productive in this community.

Kadiyen Illidge was a promising young adult. She connected with people of all ages and backgrounds. She was very conscious about what she ate, her public appearance, even her speech.

What I observed was an individual who demonstrated the six pillars of character: Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring and Citizenship. She also had an exemplary work ethic that enhanced the work she accomplished in my law practice. There are many others like her in this community, being raised by respectable, law abiding parents.

However, news reports and data provided to our community regarding senseless killings, indicate that over a 20 year period in the Virgin Islands, [there were over 860 senseless killings and murders](#). These numbers are staggering and unacceptable. We are a community of approximately 100,000 people. Is this our idea of paradise? What must we do to change course immediately to stem the tide of criminal activity in our community? As a lifelong Virgin Islander who cares deeply about these islands, I have some very serious suggestions that should be considered and implemented.

1. We need a comprehensive law enforcement policy to include all local law enforcement stakeholders such as teachers, preachers, police, lawyers, judges, and the BOC. We must decide whether our overall policy is retribution, deterrence, or rehabilitation. This policy should be informed by data from other similarly situated jurisdictions, experts in the fields of psychiatry, medicine and social behavior. This will mean rewriting large portions of our criminal code, (i.e. Title 14 V.I.C.). Additionally, we should also revisit 17 V.I.C. dealing with The Russell Law Firm, LLP 2157 King Cross Street, Christiansted VI 00820 Tel: (340) 692-0832 Fax: (844) 272-0308 Email: canaanlawgroup@gmail.com education and 34 V.I.C. dealing with social welfare in light of the comprehensive policies we envision.
2. Specific actions needed immediately to reduce violent crime could include: strict enforcement of the no tint policy for all vehicles in our territory; strict enforcement of housing community lease provisions that allow for random searches with or without a warrant; frequent nightly random searches of vehicles for a predetermined period of time.
3. Change and redesign our prisons – focus on acceptance of responsibility; resources that support meaningful rehabilitation and re-entry into society; constant bombardment with positive reinforcement using lectures, movies, videos, games, sports, entertainment and activities used toward retooling the young unexposed and underdeveloped mind.
4. Strict enforcement of school truancy laws - mandatory education until 16 years of age without exception - require parents to be held accountable for their children 16 years and younger – use fines and rewards - money is always an incentive to do the right thing.
5. Parents under the age of 25 should attend parenting classes designed to expose and teach them strong parenting skills.
6. Legalize marijuana and sex working; get rid of the underground economy that criminals thrive on. Take it away from them and tax it.
7. Bring back the housing community police force - community engagement is linked to reduction in crime and will eliminate our silence and complacency to all the violent crimes and illegal activity in our community - we are all responsible for each other's safety and well-being.
8. Churches, pastors and the clergy should help us eliminate the prudish mindset about sex education that discourages access to information about safe sex to avoid unwanted pregnancies. Research has shown that early pregnancies have socio economic implications. All schools private, parochial, and public should teach sex education in a meaningful way.

9. When good people remain silent, evil thrives - we will differ, but in the end, there is more common ground between us than discord - together we can save our beautiful Virgin islands from crime and the evil that is with us - this is our home.

Submitted on Friday by: Ronald E. Russell, a former V.I. legislator

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