

# Velinor Op-Ed: Policing Is Not About Rhetoric or Grandstanding, It's About Taking Action to Deter Crime and Being a Guardian of the Community

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I affirm that “the arc of the moral universe bends toward justice.” I accepted the role of Commissioner with humility, confidence, and a vision to inspire and actively manage leaders to participate in a more unified and protected territory. The position, by its very nature, requires someone with character and competence. From the onset of my arrival, there were naysayers, not due to my performance, but because of my character and experience. Some have gone to extreme measures in attempts to malign me. Nonetheless, I journey forward with a singular purpose of doing the right thing regardless of popularity, jealousy, and ignorance. I am one dimensional when it comes to policing - do the right thing even when it is not popular. There is a separation of the branches of government for a reason - to minimize undue influence and to have a system of checks and balances.

My experience has taught me that there are two types of employees - the performers and the talkers. The “talkers” track record demonstrates a lack of tangible accomplishments. The performers work towards accomplishing organizational goals. I appreciate the performers in each branch of government- legislative, executive, and judicial. The 34th legislature has 4 senators who were prior police officers - 3 of whom held supervisory positions and have provided recommendations on policing efforts and strategies. The position of Commissioner is nominated by Governor Bryan and confirmed by the Senate. All but one senator supported my appointment. The sole non-supporter stated that regardless of my qualifications, he would never support me because of my credentials as federal agent. As they say, we will minimize and marginalize our own. Nonetheless, I will engage with any senator on policing efforts. However, I do not accept grandstanding, misrepresenting, or fabricating as forms of legitimate communication. The lack of couth and candor are incompatible with the rule of law, which I opt to not partake.

Policing requires doing the job right. Twenty-first century policing highlights the pillars of building trust, developing policies, technology enhancement, crime reduction, training and education, and officer wellness.

Studies have shown it takes between 18 months to 5 years to change organizational culture. With change, I am relating to the cultural practices that are consistent with professionalism, accountability, and effective communication; having discipline, and working to make our community better for everyone. Change does not come overnight or without resistance. Yet, discipline is required to fortify police tenets. Police organizations must be above political influence in addressing crimes and managing its personnel. Again, there is a reason for the separation of government.

It is important that the people of the territory know and understand my commitment to do right by the people of the VI and to be good stewards of funding allotted for VIPD. I am a Virgin Islander, born and raised. I do not bow or bend to shenanigans. I do not apologize for my experience as a federal agent. 20 years ago, my priority was to pursue illegal possessors and traffickers of firearms. Even then, there were gun crimes and killings, despite our collective law enforcement efforts. The trepidation, influenced by a lack of trust of police and fear of offenders, has contributed to the reluctance of witnesses.

Since 2000, there have been 927 people killed, an average of 44 per year. Between 2002 and 2017 there were 733 homicides. The solvability rate has consistently lagged below the expectation of every Commissioner and each administration, who aims to solve 100 percent of the homicides. One person or Department does not bear the burden of years of increased socioeconomic divide, community rivalries, retaliations, drug cartels, and gun trafficking. I have reiterated the need for police and community engagement to solve crimes. There are homicides that can be solved immediately if community members came forward as witnesses. Some people have made a choice to not participate in progress, to turn blind-eyes to criminal behavior. It does not help that a sitting senator once told the community to not come forward to assist officers. More problematic is that the senator was a former police officer. Nonetheless, I encourage my officers to continue to pursue justice for our victims.

The 4 pillars of territorial transformation stand on the foundation of unity and support of the branches of government. Simply put, we (the community and VIPD) can work together to address the small number of people that causes havoc and violence in our community.

#### 1. Reduction in Crime

- Revived relationship with CrimeStoppers

- Accessibility to the community who have provided tips to aid the PD in thwarting several potential crimes.
- Authored Virgin Islands Crime Initiative
- Collaboration between VIPD and federal agents regarding Hospital Ground killings
- Partnered with federal agents on violent crime investigations
- Reestablished relationship with VI Housing Authority to work together to reduce criminal activity and to solve crimes in public housing community
- Mobile command deployment in STX
- Timely press releases
- Town halls and virtual meetings with business stakeholders
- Increased foot patrol on Main Street STT; boardwalk STX/Frederiksted
- Officers getting out of vehicles
- Reintroduction of ShotSpotter
- Wellness check when responding to ShotSpotter alerts
- Old Year's Night Illegal Gunfire- 18 firearms confiscated
- Development of the Crime Gun Intelligence Center (CGIC)
- Increased Issuance of citations
- Firearm Substations at airports

## 2. Constitutional policing/ Consent Decree

- Production of more timely submission of reports
- Substantial compliance with federal mandates, with exception of all 6 paragraphs

## 3. Community trust and engagement

- Regular guest on radio talk shows
- Met with community groups such rotary clubs, housing communities, etc.
- Met with business owners in both districts to address crime issues
- Conducted community engagement survey, results available on website
- Transparency with officer involved crimes
- Partnering with other agencies for public safety; Public Works, Department of Health, and Department of Human Services (DHS)
- Created a missing person policy inclusive of Silver Alert collaborating with VITEMA and DHS

## 4. Recruitment and Retention

- Encouraged and offered more trainings to employees
- Conduct a weekly meeting open to all employees to address any concerns
- Invitation to external leaders as guests to weekly meeting
- Provided Servant Leadership Training for Command level and offered a 4- part series to all employees
- Increased activities to involve employees: Black History Challenge, Administrative Support Appreciation
- Inaugural Employee Appreciation Day
- Keeping employees informed via emails
- Organizational development retreats for command level and executives
- Community Support Officers onboarded
- Rejuvenation of Police Auxiliary program

- Weekly meetings open to all employees

In my quest to support the people of the territory and businesses, several past due accounts were brought current to continue business with local businessowners. Additional implementations and performances internally and externally includes:

- Accountability - 3 levels of approval to track overtime
- \$10 million reduction in overtime in 2020 when compared to 2019
- Camera project under way
- Finalizing the Strategic Plan
- GPS installed in vehicles
- Introduction of new police uniform scheduled for May 14
- Online options for Records Request
- Received sub-recipient grantees for Highway Safety federally funded grants to reduce the de-obligation of funds and increase partnerships with external entities to include EMS, LGO, Public Works
- Reinstallation of ShotSpotter and using its analytics for crime analysis and community engagement
- Reestablished firearm ID cards

Policing is not about rhetoric or grandstanding. It is about taking action to deter crime and being a guardian of the community by offering responsive and professional public safety service to our community – protecting people and property.

Submitted Tuesday evening by Police Spokesman Toby Derima on behalf of Police Commissioner Trevor Velinor.