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Velinor's Contract as Commissioner of VIPD Not Being Renewed When it Expires This Month

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Police Commissioner Trevor Velinor during a Senate hearing in 2019. Mr. Velinor's contract to lead the police department will not be renewed when it expires at the end of June 2021, according to people with knowledge of the matter. By. VI LEGISLATURE

Governor Albert Bryan will not renew the contract of V.I.P.D. Commissioner Trevor Velinor when it ends this month, the Consortium has learned, a decision that highlight's the administration's struggle to tame the crime problem in the USVI with nearly two dozen homicides for the year so far, the overwhelming majority of which — eighteen — have occurred on St. Croix, followed by St. Thomas with two, and St. John with one.

Two people with knowledge of the matter confirmed it to the Consortium. The first on Monday, and the other on Thursday, when Mr. Bryan made the announcement during a cabinet meeting.

On Monday, the Consortium sought a response from Mr. Velinor, however the commissioner provided neither a confirmation nor a denial. "I'm not going to talk on that issue right now," the police commissioner said. "I am here with the territory for as long as I am here, so to speak, and at some point myself and or the governor will address my status. But right now I'm continuing to lead the police department."

Mr. Velinor added, "When there is information to provide I will, but at this juncture I'm just here to work; I'm performing a job."

Governor Bryan didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

[Ray Martinez](#) from St. Thomas, who in 2019 was named director of the the Virgin Islands Law Enforcement Planning Commission, is being considered for the job, said the two people, though they were not certain that he would be chosen. Mr. Martinez was once director of intelligence at the V.I.P.D.

During the announcement of Mr. Velinor as police commissioner in 2019, Government House said the appointment was 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, state and local governments. [A similar arrangement](#) was actualized during the former Governor Kenneth Mapp administration for then-Health Commissioner Michelle Davis.

Mr. Velinor in October was criticized by three police unions, and the group wrote a no confidence letter addressed to Mr. Bryan that [called for the resignation of the commissioner](#) "post haste." The unions alleged Mr. Velinor had become "hostile and condescending to our membership especially those who met with you or oppose his failed leadership decisions."

In May, Mr. Velinor [was flogged](#) by Senator Steven D. Payne, who sponsored a bill calling for Mr. Velinor's removal once his contract expired. The measure scolded the commissioner for failing to curtail crime in known hot spots. It said Mr. Velinor had "principally been reactive rather than proactive by belatedly deploying his police force and setting up remote police stations, police foot patrols and vehicle patrols in affected areas only after violent incidents, including multiple gun violence murders, have occurred." The bill also highlighted what was described as the territory's "dubious international reputation as the fourth highest area for homicides in the world per capita."

The bill then pointed to 108 homicides that occurred in the territory under Mr. Velinor's tenure, and said, "most of the homicides in 2019 and 2020 in the Virgin Islands have remained unsolved by the Police Department."

During a May interview with the Consortium responding to Mr. Payne, the police commissioner defended his leadership and vowed to continue working with the resources at his disposal. "My role here is to do a job, and the job that I really highlight is my purpose for coming here which is to lead a police department. And sometimes when you're leading you're going to take positions that are not popular. As such I will continue to perform my duties at the best of my capability with the resources that I have," he said.

The commissioner also rejected the argument from Mr. Payne that the homicides occurring in the USVI are due to a lack of leadership. "I looked at the stats for the last 20 years," he said. "So from 2000 to present, and I've seen the crime trend where we've averaged well over 40 homicides per year every single year for the most part. We've been as high as 61 homicides and we've seen some in the low 30s. But ultimately my responsibility is to try to find ways that I can get resources that we need to do the job; I can influence individuals to be a part of policing, and for us to coordinate with our community to address issues before they become homicides, and also when they are in fact homicides, that we're able to work those cases and to find justice for the victims."

Asked whether he's been successful in the areas mentioned, Mr. Velinor said, "I wouldn't be the person to articulate success; I think success comes from our community. What success looks like is something that we all are a part of. I'd love to see less homicides in our territory, but as I've said, it's not simply a policing issue, it's an issue that police plays a significant part of solving and deterring crime, but so too does is the greater community."

Mr. Velinor said he's gotten positive feedback from the governor. "I often say that my reputation precedes me prior to even coming home to the Virgin Islands. I think I have demonstrated credibility, my integrity is very high, and I continue to demonstrate competency. So those are the things that I came here with and I'm going to leave here at whatever time with."

The commissioner has over 30 years of law enforcement experience, with the vast majority of those years as an ATF agent. "I think the governor appreciates the fact that I'm here and that I've done the best job that I can do with the resources we have, in terms of trying to really facilitate a police department that we know is under a consent decree and yet we've continued to make strides towards full compliance."

He added, "Before me there were many homicides and with any commissioner that sits in the seat there are going to be homicides. Now, how we address those homicides is so important to give people a sense of safety and a sense of understanding that they can also be empowered to be a part of the solution."