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As Biden Opens \$350 Billion in Covid Funding to Fight Crime, Bryan Sees Opportunity to Expand Crime-Fighting Initiative in USVI

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2015 shooting on the Queen Mary Highway near Central High School on St. Croix. The then-Mapp administration declared a state of emergency because of the gun violence in Sept. of the same year. By. ERNICE GILBERT FOR VI CONSORTIUM

Governor Albert Bryan on Saturday announced that his administration would expand its crime-fighting initiatives with Covid-19 funding following President Joe Biden's announcement Wednesday that state and local officials whose jurisdictions are seeing heightened gun violence can use \$350 billion in Covid-19 relief dollars to bolster their police departments.

For example, officials can use the funding to hire more law enforcement personnel even if total personnel climbs beyond pre-Covid levels. The funds can also be used to invest in programs that try to identify and mediate potentially violent conflicts.

Governor Bryan, noting the president's announcement, said Saturday, “We have a tremendous opportunity now with President Biden’s green light to significantly increase the tools we need. These resources will help us purchase more equipment, hire more officers and add more cameras to our growing surveillance network to help stop the violent crime plaguing our community. We also plan to use these resources to purchase additional scanning equipment at our territory’s ports.”

According to [the Wall Street Journal](#), citing Biden administration officials, the U.S. Labor Department will use existing funding for summer workforce development programs for young people and will help connect formerly incarcerated people with jobs. The Justice Department will take additional steps to crack down on gun trafficking and revoke licenses for gun dealers who willfully violate federal law, WSJ said.

“It means more police officers, more nurses, more counselors, more social workers or community violence interrupters to help resolve issues before they escalate into crimes,” Mr. Biden said Wednesday.

Gov't House said public schools can use their share of \$122 billion in rescue money on community violence intervention programs and other public safety strategies.

In the last three months of 2020, homicides rose 32.2 percent in cities with populations of at least a million, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Quarterly Uniform Crime Report (via WSJ).

According to Gov't House, citing outgoing Police Commissioner Trevor Velinor, the USVI has had fewer violent crimes and more arrests in 2019-2020 than the same period in 2017-2019.

There were 3,119 violent crimes with 608 arrests in 2019-2020, compared with 4,324 violent crimes with 524 arrests in 2017-2018. In those same timeframes, VIPD seized 375 firearms in 2019-2020 versus 256 that police seized in 2017-2018.

In the last four years (2017-2020), there were 192 homicides in the territory resulting in 55 arrests. Of the 55 arrests, 39 were in calendar years 2019 and 2020, and there were 16 homicide arrests in 2017 and 2018.

Last year, [47 people died through homicide](#) in the USVI, and 2021 appears to be trending in the same direction [with twenty-five homicides for the year so far](#).