

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Sports, Parks and Recreation Wants Enforcement Arm and Cameras to Manage Littering, Other Problems at Beaches

Government / **Published On July 03, 2021 07:12 AM /**

Kyle Murphy **July 03, 2021**



Dept. of Sports, Parks and Recreation Commissioner, Calvert White, during a Senate hearing Thursday said the department will need an enforcement arm in an effort to ascertain that individuals abide by rules set forth at the territory's beaches and parks.

Senators, among them Sen. Franklin Johnson, spoke of having signage at beaches that would make clear what is acceptable. Mr. Johnson spoke of beachgoers not cleaning up after their dogs, for example. He described himself as a stickler for such matters, having seen individuals walk their dogs on beaches and not cleanup after their animals.

Mr. White said only service dogs were allowed on beaches. He then expounded on the need for the department's enforcement arm to be created. "We don't have an enforcement arm in this department," he said. Mr. White said he had spoken to another lawmaker about having enforcement at beaches in particular because of some of what was taking place.

Senator Kurt Violet said if people would clean up after themselves there would be no need for an enforcement arm. "It's just a shame that it seems everything we have to try and regulate — go to the beach, pick your trash up — these are simplistic areas we shouldn't have to enforce."

Mr. Violet said he visited Cramer's Park recently and saw garbage overflowing from bins. "We just need to do a better job as Virgin Islanders and stop making this government spend excessive money on stuff you should be doing on your own," he said.

Mr. White said he started and abandoned a territory-wide campaign called "If It Ain't Fit, Go With It," because people were not taking heed. In fact, the commissioner said the campaign appeared to be counterproductive. "Since we started that campaign it seems more trash started to come to the beaches," he said.

He made the case for cameras to be installed at D.S.P.R facilities as it would provide visual on those leaving their trash behind. "Now we can see who is leaving the garbage, we could see who is not taking the trash with them," he said.

Senator Carrion sought from the commissioner a cost to effectuate an enforcement arm. Mr. White said the new division would need at least one enforcement officer on St. John, two on St. Thomas and three or four on St. Croix. This "would be ideal," he said. Relative to a budget, Mr. White said he could not provide an accurate ballpark figure. "We would have to look at the unions and see what they start off at," he said.

The commissioner said the enforcement arm would also be tasked with other roles, including managing swim zones that are sometimes traversed by boaters. That job is currently being managed by lifeguards. "There are times when the lifeguards get in verbal confrontations with the captains of those vessels," Mr. White said.

Mr. Carrion asked that information relative to the cost of starting an enforcement arm at D.S.P.R. be provided to the Senate as soon as possible. "I really agree with you that it is something that is much needed in the absence of us humans doing what we are supposed to do. That's where the government comes in to establish the policies and enforce them," he said.