

logo not found or type unknown

Bill Aimed at Curtailing 'Ghost Guns' - Weapons Assembled in USVI Using Imported Parts to Make Them Untraceable - Wins Approval

Crime / **Published On October 14, 2021 06:01 AM /**

Kyle Murphy **October 14, 2021**

Image not found or type unknown



Ghost guns shown during a Senate hearing on Wednesday on legislation aimed at curtailing the practice in the USVI. By. THE V.I. POLICE DEPARTMENT

The Committee on Homeland Security, Justice and Public Safety on Wednesday forwarded a bill aimed at curtailing the rise of “ghost guns” in the USVI.

Ray A. Martinez, V.I. Police Department commissioner nominee, explained the term “ghost gun” in his opening testimony.

“Ghost guns are fully functional firearms that can be made at home using parts and kits that are available for purchase online,” he said. “The key component of a firearm is the receiver, which holds the parts that enable it to actually shoot, such as the hammer, bolt, or breechblock, and firing mechanism. Ghost guns are made using receivers that are not technically finished and require a few additional steps at home, such as drilling a few holes before they can be used to make a functional gun.”

He added, “Kits and online tutorials for making guns using unfinished receivers have mushroomed in recent years and do not require any technical expertise. These guns made at home using unfinished receivers have become known as “ghost guns” because they do not have a serial number or any other identifying information and are therefore untraceable when they are recovered after being used in a crime.”

Bill No 34-0072, an Act amending title 23 Virgin Islands Code, Chapter 5, providing for the declaration of firearm components upon their entry into the Virgin Islands, and other related purposes, was sponsored by Senator Dwayne DeGraff.

“Presently you can go online and decide how to get a firearm under the radar into the territory and people have legally purchased firearm parts in the United States and have mailed them home and assembled them here in the territory,” Mr. DeGraff said. “It is not illegal.”

He mentioned a recent case in the territory where a [federal indictment](#) alleged that two individuals participated in an unlicensed firearm business. “The indictment alleges that the individuals ordered gun parts and accessories from various companies in North Carolina and Florida and had the items delivered to the respective Post Office box in the territory. The individuals purchased money orders totaling over \$60,000 from the [United States Postal Service] to pay for the firearm parts. This is just to show that there is a trend,” he said.

Mr. DeGraff wrapped up his defense of the measure by stating, “We are trying to avoid having illegal firearms proliferating in the territory, and with the heightened gun violence that we are seeing, this is one of my quests trying to address some of the gun violence and get some illegal firearms off the street.”

Mr. Martinez said the V.I.P.D. “wholeheartedly supports this amendment.” He added, “There is no local statute that establishes requirements for the declaration of firearm components. To that end, firearms can legally be disassembled on the mainland, most components shipped to the Virgin Islands via the US Postal Service or similar courier service and reassembled.”

“It is important to note that parts of handguns are mailable, except for handgun frames, receivers or other parts or components,” the commissioner added.

Mr. Martinez said eight states have enacted similar laws to address the problem. “This proposed bill provides the territory with the opportunity to stem the tide of these guns and their components,” he said.

Senator Novelle Francis, a former law enforcement officer and police commissioner, said the ghost guns workaround provide a loophole that criminals have utilized to “move their firearm industry forward, or their attempt to.”

He added, “We often hear that we don’t manufacture firearms in this territory, but obviously we are assembling them [to] be used for the same purpose for the criminal element, hence our attempt here to address this particular issue.”

Senator Franklin Johnson asked whether an individual is required to be a licensed firearm dealer to import gun parts into the USVI. Eric Chancellor, V.I. chief deputy attorney general, responded, "You do not."

Mr. Johnson sought to learn how many ghost guns have been confiscated by the V.I.P.D. Mr. Martinez said that within the last three years the department has "confiscated easily over a dozen of these ghost guns."

Senator Steven Payne chimed in, "Even though they have confiscated about 12, that does not mean we don't have another 50 roaming the islands that just haven't been confiscated."

Mr. Chancellor said the Department of Justice supports the bill, and he proposed a few technical amendments. He also suggested that a new criminal offense be created that states, "All individuals that have possession of a firearm component must also register it with the proper authorities," which he argued would close loopholes in the measure.

Bill sponsor Sen. Degraff said, "I am committed. We can get the information, put it in, move it forward in [the Committee on Rules and Judiciary] and amend it."

Sens. Johnson, James, Degraff, Francis, Alma Francis-Heyliger, Kenneth Gittens, and Payne voted to move the measure to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary.