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Antonio Emanuel Announced as Director of Office of Gun Violence Prevention

Government / **Published On January 26, 2022 05:02 AM /**

Linda Straker **January 26, 2022**

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Antonio Emanuel was announced by Gov. Albert Bryan on Jan. 24, 2022 as director of the Office of Gun Violence Prevention. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

The Office of Gun Violence Prevention will be headed by Antonio Emanuel who not only has a law enforcement background but also has experience in working with at-risk youth within their communities, according to Governor Albert Bryan.

[Bill 33-0126](#), now Act [8423](#), was introduced to the community [during a June 11, 2020 Senate hearing](#). It authorized the creation the V.I. Office of Gun Violence Prevention within the Office of the Governor. The office, according to the Act will be tasked with formulating effective and innovative strategies designed to reduce and prevent gun violence in the Virgin Islands. The

measure was sponsored by former Senator Myron Jackson. The OGV was recently allocated \$2 million over a four-year period.

The office will also “make recommendations to the Legislature of the Virgin Islands for legislation to strengthen gun laws and for initiatives that provide recreational, vocational and economic opportunities for young adults in the Virgin Islands.”

Governor Bryan announced the head of the office while delivering the 2022 State of the Territory Address Monday night. In a wide-ranging address, he said the best way to fight crime is to prevent it from occurring in the first place.

“While Mr. Emanuel has a law enforcement background, he was selected for his experience in working with at-risk youth within their communities,” the governor said. “We have tasked Mr. Emanuel with executing strategic community-based interventions in line with the National Network for Safer Communities model.”

Mr. Emanuel will now serve as the head of the Governor’s Advisory Council on Community Violence Intervention. The council brings together government, nonprofit, religious, and private sector partners to provide guidance to the Office of Gun Violence Prevention.

“I am committed to providing resources and support to ensure the success of this program and hope that this Legislature will join me in that effort,” said the governor as he informed members of the Legislature that illegal firearms continue to be an escalating problem in the territory. “In 2021, VIPD confiscated 153 illegal firearms,” he disclosed during his address.

Speaking about the need for his office and the Legislature to put measures in place to reduce and eventually eliminate illegal firearms entering the territory, the governor reminded the Senate of his efforts in 2021.

“At the beginning of last year, I submitted legislation to bolster the territory’s laws surrounding firearms. Following Senate input at a Committee of the Whole, I revised and resubmitted the legislation, which now seeks to institute a 24-hour declaration of firearms entering the territory; increased punitive measures for failing to report lost or stolen firearms; and to establish safe firearm storage requirements,” he said.

“Senators, we have a common goal in addressing the presence of illegal firearms in the territory. I look forward to working with you to see this legislation through the process of passage and enactment,” he said.

V.I. Office of Management and Budget Director, Jenifer O’Neal, recently disclosed during a meeting of the Committee on Committee on Disaster Recovery and Infrastructure that the \$2 million allocated to the Office of Gun Violence is for its operations.

“It is \$2 million for the Office of Gun Violence Prevention to deal with the staffing and the programs that will be coming from that office,” she said.

According to a description of the office's mission as seen in the Act, the office's objectives shall be met by establishing strong alliances and partnerships with the law enforcement community; social service agencies and organizations; non-profit and faith-based organizations; community leaders, including elected officials; concerned residents, victims, survivors, violence interrupters; private and public sector and local and federal government agencies and partners.

Among the staff of the office shall be an executive director, district directors, survivor engagement specialists, community engagement coordinators, analysts, an office manager, and violence interrupters, according to the law.

The office shall also help organize and take part in initiatives that bring awareness to the effect of gun violence in the community such as press conferences, marches, prayer vigils, town halls, community meetings, training, conferences, seminars, workshops, retreats, and healing circles.

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