

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Officials Hope New Lottery Game Will Reduce Illegal Gambling, Keep Lottery Money Within Territory

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Elesha George **February 18, 2023**



VI Lottery Executive Director Raymond Williams. By. GOV'T HOUSE

Will a new, sanctioned lottery game reduce instances of illegal gambling? That's what authorities are betting on, as the V.I. Lottery launched "Caribbean Numbers" this week, which gives players an opportunity to win up to \$20,000 by choosing numbers from 0-99.

A partnership between the Caribbean Lottery and V.I. Lottery, the game took "months of extensive research" from the parties, according to Shelly-Ann Tonge, VI Lottery general manager, to determine exactly what players wanted from a new game in the USVI.

VI Lottery Executive Director Raymond Williams said the new game should discourage illegal gambling and like the other games, it has been designed and developed to keep the money within the economy.

"The money stays here. If nothing else... the VI Lottery was designed and developed many years ago as an opportunity for entrepreneurship. It gave and it still gives today opportunities to our entire community," he said.

"The money that you invest in our games and in these new games stays here," he assured.

The VI Lottery was a sponsor of the Caribbean Music Festival on Friday as well as the Agricultural Art Fair this weekend.

Part proceeds from every game purchased goes towards funding local goodwill programs including the V.I. Pharmaceutical Fund, the Education Initiative Fund, the Government Employees' Retirement System, and the Office of Veteran Affairs among many others.

Police Commissioner Ray Martinez spoke to the need for enforcement of legal gaming, recalling a time when he worked at the VIPD, when many illegal tickets were confiscated within the territory.

"Going back to the mid-2000s when I was then the Director of the Intelligence Unit for the VIPD, we confiscated hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of illegal lottery tickets whether it was from Puerto Rico, whether it was the sidewalk lottery system that utilized mostly by the Dominican and the Haitian community - the parole as many people affectionately call it," he said.

With the assistance of the U.S. Secret Service, Mr. Martinez said they discovered that millions of dollars were leaving the territory illegally.

"Tens of millions of dollars was leaving the territory because we had failed as the VIPD and even our federal partners as well, we had failed to enforce the laws and of course some of our laws are still ambiguous," he noted.

However, the commissioner said outside of the money that was leaving the territory, illegal gaming also risks the introduction of other illegal activities that can cause violence within the USVI.

He shared that the VIPD is currently running operations between the USVI and Puerto Rico, all the way to the U.S. mainland, where proceeds from illegal gaming are being used to launder money.

"Hartford Connecticut, New York City, Miami, Chicago, as far as South Carolina where these proceeds from these illegal gaming are then utilized as a way of hiding monies, laundering monies all tied here to the territory," Mr. Martinez explained.

The police commissioner said he believes that by introducing these new games, the VI Lottery is encouraging individuals to move away from partaking in illegal games and purchase instead from licensed vendors.

