

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Senators Raise Concerns on Policing Priorities Amid Unrelenting Gun Violence, VIPD Cites Manpower Limitations

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VIPD vehicles at the department's Ancilmo D. Marshall Command (Zone C) located in Basin Triangle, Christiansted. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

Senator Franklin Johnson and other lawmakers on Wednesday expressed concerns during a hearing on policing priorities and enforcement as crime in the U.S. Virgin Islands continues to impact communities.

Lawmakers also spoke on the use of illegal motorbikes and ATVs on the island's streets, and Mr. Johnson questioned the selection process for government positions and the

need for increased police presence in town areas.

In response to the senator's inquiries about the selection process, the director of HR explained that resumes are submitted to Government House before interviews are conducted by their office. Mr. Johnson argued that the process should be reversed, with interviews conducted first, then sent to Government House for approval.

On the issue of police presence in town areas, Deputy Police Chief in the St. Croix District, Uston Cornelius, assured Mr. Johnson that the department is working to address the issue. However, due to manpower limitations, the V.I. Police Department can only do so much, he said. The VIPD is also working on implementing Intel-driven strategies and camera systems to monitor the areas in question.

The senator further expressed his dissatisfaction with the lack of enforcement on basic laws, specifically citing the issue of illegal motorbikes and ATVs. In response, the department cited a lack of resources and the difficulty in chasing offenders as reasons for their limited enforcement.

Mr. Johnson suggested that addressing these smaller issues would help prevent larger problems in the community, drawing a comparison to New York City's successful clean-up efforts. He requested information on the number of citations being issued by the VIPD in relation to the amount of money being spent on overtime.

While the VIPD could not provide exact numbers, officials did mention an officer who had issued 77 citations in a single month. They also cited an average of 300 citations per month being issued by the Traffic Unit in the St. Thomas-St. John district.

Senator Dwayne DeGraff echoed Mr. Johnson's concerns, asking whether traffic camera systems could be used to identify motorcyclists not wearing helmets. The department agreed to look into the possibility and test the system's capabilities.

Senate President Senator Novelle Francis Jr. was also present at the hearing, offering condolences to families who recently suffered loss as a result of gun violence.

The committee took a brief recess before resuming discussions on the topics at hand, including union contracts and wellbeing of the VIPD's personnel and civilian staff. Mr. DeGraff shared his positive experiences from his time on the force, praising the work of the officers and expressing hope for improvements in the department.

The hearing highlighted the challenges faced by the VIPD due to limited resources and manpower, even as gun violence and other crimes remain persistent. The senators' concerns emphasized the importance of addressing smaller issues in the community to prevent larger problems and ensure the safety and wellbeing of the island's residents.