

## COMMITTEE RECEIVES TESTIMONY ON SECURITY IMPROVEMENTS AT CORRECTIONAL FACILITY AND FORENSIC LAB IN TERRITORY

**Date :** March 24, 2017

ST. THOMAS- Members of the Committee on Homeland Security, Justice and Public Safety, chaired by Sen. Brian A. Smith, met on Friday at the Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall to receive status updates and discuss challenges within the Department of Justice, Bureau of Corrections and the Virgin Islands Police Department.

Rick Mullgrav, Director of the Virgin Islands Bureau of Corrections noted the repaired gates, doors and sliders, in addition to the construction of the security check booth at the entrance of the Golden Grove facility. Renovations in the cafeteria and kitchen are currently underway and slated for completion by the end of April. Blower and exhaust fans were recently installed in the housing units to regulate the temperature in the housing units.

The husbandry program, tilapia farm, and vegetable farm programs remain active however, our other programs such as bee keeping, wood working, upholstery, and auto body repair were suspended due to the lack of funding and need of certified instructors. Funding was recently approved to install a perimeter fence, to regulate the traffic in and out of the facility and secure their livestock. Their most successful venture to date, is the video visitation feature, that allows families to communicate with their loved ones sent abroad to other correctional facilities.

This feature is available in both facilities on St. Croix and St. Thomas. "While we continue to make progress, the Bureau faces numerous challenges. As we are currently operating under two Settlement Agreements, we face the constant need to increase staffing, provide ongoing training, implement policies and procedures, and improve the Bureau's infrastructure," said Director Mullgrav.

Staff training on the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) policy will be completed in both districts by the end of June, while training in accordance with the mental health policies have been completed and approved. The bureau is currently working with the Department of Health to secure adequate placement for mentally ill prisoners and those deemed not guilty due to insanity.

During his testimony, Claude E. Walker, Esq., Attorney General of the Virgin Islands spoke about the Medical Examiner's Office efforts towards establishing a new, state of the art forensic laboratory in the territory.

The lab will provide several services that are currently not available, such as DNA, drug and ballistics testing. When completed, the facility will be a significant tool in increasing the number of

successful prosecutions and reducing the amount of time needed to solve crimes. The Criminal Division within the Department of Justice is in dire need of additional support staff and prosecutors to fulfill its responsibilities. This current fiscal year has a total of 285 new cases opened, with 79 felony cases and 53 misdemeanor cases on St. Croix.

There are currently 80 felony cases and 53 misdemeanor cases on St. Thomas. Attorney General Walker also noted the challenges within the Bureau of Investigation Division. This unit is responsible for all civil and criminal investigations. The staff within this division assist by conducting background investigations, serving subpoenas and discoveries, in addition to locating and transporting victims and witnesses to and from court.

“The most immediate needs for the Bureau include one additional agent for St. Croix; new and badly-needed equipment such as ammunition, bullet proof vests, radios, retractable batons, and surveillance equipment; as well as funds for training in the areas of interrogation, surveillance, investigations, and report writing,” concluded Attorney General Walker.

Delroy Richards Sr., Commissioner of the Virgin Islands Police Department emphasized the department’s desire to maintain and increase police control, rapid response to incidents, calls for service, effective investigation and solution of criminal acts, and timely apprehension of criminal perpetrators. Two major goals of the VIPD is Crime Prevention, to become fully self-sufficient by having all the necessary resources within the Virgin Islands; to include well trained and equipped personnel. The remaining testimony was given by Dennis Howell, Chairman of the Virgin Islands Parole Board.

The Virgin Islands Parole Board plans to improve their operations by: conducting on site parole board hearings, establish a parole board authority with proper staffing, educating the BOC staff on parole procedures and continue public education through town hall meetings. Chairman Howell briefly mentioned the implementation of program in which parolees pay an unspecified amount upon their release. “If you’re out on parole, you will pay to be out on the outside,” concluded Chairman Howell.

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