

THE VIRGIN ISLANDS POLICE DEPARTMENT AND THE VIRGIN ISLANDS MANAGEMENT AGENCY SHARES AN OVERVIEW WITH SENATORS

Date : March 12, 2019



ST. THOMAS- Members of the Committee on Homeland Security, Justice, and Public Safety chaired by Sen. Steven Payne convened in a meeting at the Capitol Building on Tuesday, to receive testimony on the status of the Virgin Islands Police Department (VIPD) and the Virgin Islands Management Agency (VITEMA).

VIPD shared an update. In comparison to 2018, there is an increase in the number of homicides as of January 2019 Territory-wide. To combat crime in the community, VIPD is collaborating with federal partners to investigate crimes. Additionally, traffic and patrol initiatives are effective in seizing drugs, guns, and arresting criminals. VIPD launched 'Operation Crack Down' with saturated patrol officers who target illegal tint on windows, seatbelt violations, uninsured vehicles, and license plates. In 2018, VIPD recovered 54 illegal firearms on St. Croix and 48 on St. Thomas;

totaling 122. Thus far, in 2019 VIPD confiscated 15 illegals guns.

Sen. Payne inquired about the steps taken to use technology to improve the service of police officers. In response, VIPD Acting Police Commissioner Jason Marsh stated that VIPD began implementing the camera project. Recent police graduates wear axon Body cameras. The goal is to furnish all patrol officers with body cams. However, additional grant funding is required. VIPD is in the process of implementing the Public Safety Solution: an automation system to report incidents and manage records. Recently, VIPD has twenty-five graduated officers. Recruitment efforts continue by advertising on a variety of media outlets, events and by partnering with the U.S. Army.

Separately, VITEMA shared an overview. The 2019 Disaster Preparedness Plan of VITEMA is inclusive of storing essential commodities such as generators, tarps, meals, water, blankets, and cots in storage on both districts. On St. Thomas, there are 24,960 meals, 26 generators, 509 tarps, 61,408 water, and 702 sheets. On St. John, there are 39,000 liters of water and 26,880 meals in storage. On St. Croix there are 270,000 liters of water, 1200 blankets, 15 generators, 179,600 meals-ready-to-eat, 1,000 sheets, and 480 cots.

VITEMA Acting Director Denise Lewis stated that updating and finalizing the Territorial Comprehensive Hazard Mitigation and Resiliency Plan and the Territorial Emergency Operations Plan are some of the goals for VITEMA. Additionally, VITEMA is hiring for critical vacancies and managing projects funded by the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program.

Post Hurricanes Irma and Maria, there was extensive damage to the Territory's tsunami warning system; in which most of the tsunami sirens are dysfunctional. Territory-wide, there are forty-four sirens and out of that seven are operable. For the safety of the residents, VITEMA has conducted silent testing monthly on the sirens that are functional. FEMA Public Assistance Program will fund ninety percent of the tsunami warning system to replace, restore and to strengthen the structure. The Community Block Development Grant Disaster Recovery will disseminate ten percent of the funding through the V.I. Housing Finance Authority. ###