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**VIRGIN ISLANDS
PORT AUTHORITY**

TESTIMONY

Submitted to the Honorable Kenneth L. Gittens
Senator
35th Legislature of the U.S. Virgin Islands

Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security,
Justice, and Public Safety

Presented by:

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on behalf of

Mr. Carlton Dowe
Executive Director



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Good morning Honorable Senator Kenneth Gittens, Chairperson of the 35th Legislature's Committee on Homeland Security, Justice, and Public Safety, to the distinguished members of this Committee and other honorable senators in attendance, the legislative staff, and to the listening and viewing audience.

I am Bill Rawlins, the Assistant Executive Director of the Virgin Islands Port Authority (hereinafter referred to as VIPA). I will be presenting this testimony on behalf of VIPA's Executive Director, Mr. Carlton Dowe, who is unable to testify today due to a scheduling conflict. Other VIPA staff accompanying me today are the St. Croix Police Chief Louis Flynn; St. Thomas/St. John Police Chief Edred Wilkes Jr.; and Human Resources Director Ms. Diane Richardson.

My testimony today will provide an update to this body regarding VIPA's law enforcement department, our recruitment efforts, training programs, current safety-related strategies and initiatives, and administrative procedures related to VIPA's police force.

VIPA's Law Enforcement Department

The Virgin Islands Port Authority is an autonomous agency of the Government of the U.S. Virgin Islands. Our officers are responsible for protecting life and property at VIPA's two airports, and 14 seaport facilities owned and managed by the

Authority. Officers monitor and enforce all laws of the United States of America and the USVI. Protecting the safety of VIPA's ports is a year-round, 24-hour operation.

Staffing, Vacancies, and Recruitment Efforts

VIPA's current law enforcement department consists of twenty-two (22) officers in the St. Thomas/St. John district and ten (10) officers in St. Croix. The department is staffed as follows:

Positions	STT/J	STX
Chief	1	1
Lieutenants	1	0
Sergeants	3	1
Line Officers	12	6
K-9 Officers	4	0 (actively recruiting on St. Croix)
Corporals	1	0
Part-Time Officers	1	2
Total Officers	22	10
Part-Time Vacancies	1	0
Full-Time Vacancies	4	8

VIPA is experiencing serious challenges staffing its police department. This problem is not unique to VIPA as the VIPD and other police departments across the nation have reported the same issue. We have launched an aggressive recruitment program to address our staffing shortage, to include:

- Participation in career fairs held in St. Thomas and St. Croix seeking law enforcement trainees, officers, K9 officers, and part-time officers.

- Posting of job advertisements in local print and online media, and our four social media pages (Facebook, Twitter, Linked-In, and Instagram).
- VIPA offers a \$1,000 sign-on bonus in the St. Thomas/St. John district and a \$5,000 bonus in St. Croix. The bonus is higher in St. Croix where recruitment efforts have been extremely difficult. Bonuses are paid once the officer has completed his/her probationary period.
- Police recruitment posters are also posted in our airport terminals.

VIPA police officer salaries offered are comparable to local and nationwide police forces of our size. We offer a starting salary of thirty-five thousand dollars annually (\$35,000) for police officer trainees, and forty thousand nine hundred and fifty-three dollars annually (\$40,953) for police officers. VIPA also offers an excellent benefits package to include medical, dental, and eye insurance; enrollment in the Government's retirement system; 21 paid local and federal government holidays; and accrued sick and personal time off.

VIPA Police Officer Training

Officer Certification Programs

All VIPA law enforcement officers are trained via the Virgin Islands Police Department (VIPD) Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) Academy and must meet the same requirements as the officers who serve the VIPD.

Recertification training is also done via the POST Academy and includes effective and safe use of a baton, taser and firearms. Officers also receive OC aerosol spray training which helps officers deal with incidents that may involve pepper spray. Officers take classes that provide updates on local and federal law and take refresher courses on how to respond to domestic violence incidents. In addition to local laws, VIPA's officers receive training regarding federal aviation and maritime laws. VIPA's officers also train with the U.S. Coast Guard to receive first-responder experience and training to respond to maritime emergencies such as aircraft, vessel, or persons in distress or lost at sea.

Law Enforcement Procedures

Crime and Incident Prevention Strategies

As mentioned previously, the management of the territory's ports is a round-the-clock operation. While we are short-staffed, we have implemented effective strategies to make the best use of our police force to help deter crime and prevent incidents. These strategies include:

Additional Security: VIPA has hired security companies to augment our existing police staff on all three islands. These contracts were advertised and awarded via a public bidding process. The security officers at our ports are armed and monitor entry and exit points as well as assisting with traffic and pedestrian management.

Effective Scheduling: Our officers are scheduled in shifts to provide the most coverage during our peak travel hours. Each police shift is managed by a shift supervisor who ensures that daily objectives are met, and specific directives are executed.

Safety Equipment: We have upgraded and extended our camera monitoring and access control systems at all our facilities. We are actively working on repairing and installing additional lights and safety-related signage.

Communication: Effective communication is an essential aspect of public safety. Our police chiefs participate in regular meetings with our tenants to address any safety concerns proactively. VIPA also hosts regular town halls to discuss operations, updates, policies, and procedures at its ports. These meetings are open to the public and are also posted on the agency's YouTube page to be viewed by anyone unable to attend in person. Our website and social media pages are regularly updated with essential information for travelers, employees, and users of our facilities.

[Current Law Enforcement Initiatives](#)

Preventing the entry of contraband, including guns, drugs, and material that could be used for weapons of mass destruction, falls under the jurisdiction of the Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Customs and Border Protection

(CBP). VIPA's officers work closely with CBP, the Transportation and Security Administration (TSA), and VIPD to prohibit the illegal transport of contraband into the territory. Records are also kept of any contraband confiscated as well as any related arrests.

On the local front, VIPA's police collaborate with the VI Waste Management Authority, the Department of Public Works, and the Administrator's offices on each island to assist with the tagging and removal of derelict vehicles, and barring dumping at our ports and access roads. VIPA also assists the VI Bureau of Corrections with facilitating prisoner movement. We also collaborate with Government House, VIPD, and federal agents of the U.S. Secret Service to provide safety for dignitaries such as the President of the United States and other high-level officials.

Issuing Citations

VIPA's law enforcement officers do not have an extensive number of citations issued each month. As they police our air and seaports, citations issued may include minor infractions such as parking or traffic violations. Records of citations are maintained in VIPA's police precincts.

VIPA's Internal Investigations

VIPA's officers are trained to review surveillance recordings and perform proper interrogation procedures to generate reports of incidents at our ports. Reports are submitted to VIPA's internal review panel, which includes VIPA's Executive Director, the assistant and deputy executive directors, our attorneys, the chief financial officer, insurance companies, and the applicable facility manager.

Administrative Procedures

VIPA's officers have taken an oath to serve and protect. Officers may use their discretion to address issues of offenses within the boundaries of the law and VIPA's policies. Failure to follow the law or perform lawful duties will result in an internal investigation and could result in disciplinary action against the said officer. Infractions that can be addressed internally are submitted to VIPA's Human Resources Director and the Executive Director renders a final decision. All criminal cases are transferred to the USVI Attorney General's office and VIPD.

Honorable Senator Gittens, this concludes my testimony on behalf of the Port Authority. My team and I will remain available to answer any questions you may have.