

TESTIMONY

Legislature of the Virgin Islands| 35th Legislature

Committee on Homeland Security, Justice, and Public Safety

The Honorable Kenneth L. Gittens, Chairperson

Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority

Division of Environmental Enforcement

Presented by:

Anderson Poleon Sr.

Director

Good morning, Honorable Senator Kenny L. Gittens, Chairman of the Committee on Homeland Security, Justice, and Public Safety, committee members, non-committee members, colleagues, and members of the listening audience.

My name is Anderson Poleon Sr., Director of the Environmental Enforcement Division of the Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority. I am here today to provide an update on our Enforcement Division.

Our division currently consists of six Environmental Enforcement Officers and four Environmental Enforcement Inspectors territory wide which breaks down into four Officers, two Inspectors stationed on St. Croix, and two Officers, two Inspectors stationed on St. Thomas. Currently there are no Officers or Inspectors stationed on St. John.

Recruitment Efforts and Division Growth

Recruitment efforts are ongoing through our HR Division. Interviews for the position of Environmental Officers were held on October 25th which resulted in our division hiring three officers (two on St. Croix and one on St. Thomas). Interviews for new recruits were held on November 21st and 22nd and five recruits were hired, (one for St. John, two for St. Thomas, and two for St. Croix). These officers are awaiting their start date from our Finance division, and the recruits are waiting for instructions from P.O.S.T. as well as V.I.P.D. for the next academy start date.

The intent of this division is to grow in force with enough officers and inspectors to provide coverage around the clock to combat the growing problem of illegal dumping at our territory's **bin sites, landfills, businesses, Residential Areas, wastewater facilities and manholes**. With cameras installed by our IT division and a fully staffed division (20 Officers, 10 Inspectors, and 2 Compliance Investigators), the Authority will have the manpower necessary so Inspectors can monitor the bin sites and immediately contact Officers to swiftly move in and issue citations. This is the ideal plan for the Environmental Enforcement Division, however this plan cannot be put in place without additional financial resources considering the Authority is severely

underfunded. Also, we will need approximately six marked police vehicles for continuous patrolling, and investigations along with six marked Utility Terrain Vehicles equipped with trail cameras because illegal dumping is occurring in dense bushy areas where our enforcement vehicles cannot traverse. We will also need updated equipment, surveillance drones and more cameras along with updated technological monitoring systems to maneuver throughout the territory. Our division needs funding to get and keep our islands clean and our environment protected.

Training and Certifications and Recertification

All Authority Officers are currently certified and attend trainings to remain current with Law Enforcement practices. Inspectors have participated in trainings to advance their effectiveness.

Certifications and training for the past year include:

Axon Taser Weapons Instructor Certification (Ofc. Jan-23)

Safe Driving Training (Ofc. & Insp. Feb-23)

Surviving an Active Threat by VITEMA (Insp. Feb-23)

Part I Fire Arms Qualifications (Ofc. Mar-23)

Part I In-Service Training (Ofc. May-23)

Lone Wolf Officer Survival/Officer Safety Training (Ofc. May-23)

Instructor Development Course -IDC Training (Ofc. Jun-23)

Incident Reporting Training (Ofc. & Insp. Jul-23)

Hazardous Waste Operations & Emergency Response and Emergency Response Awareness (HAZWOPER) Certification (Ofc. & Insp. Aug-23)

Part II In-Service Training (Ofc. Oct-23)

OC Spray/Impact Weapon Certification (Ofc. Oct-23)

Taser/Energy Weapons Certification (Ofc. Nov-23)

Shotgun/Rifle Training (Ofc. Nov-23)

Title 19 Review, Citation/Report Writing, Training by the Attorney General's Office (Ofc. & Insp. Nov-23)

Hurricane Preparedness Training by VITEMA (Ofc. & Insp. Jan-24)

Glock Armorers Course (Ofc. Feb-24)

Adult Mental Health First Aid Certification (Ofc. Feb-24).

Re-certification efforts for the current year are already underway with the registration of our officers for the upcoming Part I Firearms Qualifications, as well as CPR/AED and First Aid Training

Citations, Enforcement Strategies, Prosecutorial Approaches and Execution of Administrative Penalties

With the increase of Officers, the Enforcement Division has already shown growth in the number of citations written since 2022. In 2022, the Authority's three officers wrote seventy-two citations totaling \$72,000 in fines. With the addition of three officers last year, to date, two hundred thirty-one citations have been written totaling \$231,000 in fines. We are expecting an even higher number of citations will be written this year. The installation of our camera system has increased the number of citations due to our Officers and Inspectors collaborating to monitor camera footage at our bin sites. When violations are captured by Inspectors, incident reports are generated and forwarded to Officers to locate and issue litter citations to the violators. Our Officers and Inspectors also check businesses to ensure their solid waste and oil collection permits are up to date (which includes the inspection of food service grease traps ensuring there are no code violations) We respond to citizen complaints concerning sewage leaks resulting in the exposure of toxins to our environment and issue permits to solid and liquid waste haulers who meet permit and inspection requirements.

Another strategy used by the Environmental Enforcement Division has been to work with our Communication's Division to educate the business and residential community on disposal regulations by appearing on various radio programs, community, and business association meetings and school camps and programs. Our team regularly assists with community education sessions keeping our citizens informed of the do's and don'ts of liquid and solid waste disposal. Our Officers are always visible during community events including Festival Villages, Food and Agricultural Fairs,

Christiansted Jump-Ups, Block Parties, D. Hamilton Jackson Celebrations, to name a few. We strive to make sure vendors are aware of disposal expectations and understand the importance of minimizing the litter footprint left behind after such events.

Although the Enforcement Division is proud of our steady progress, the Authority's legal team has begun researching our vision for more effective citation resolutions by adding a citation hearing officer for in-house hearings. These would be held at the Authority to expedite the citation hearing and resulting fines. Along with a Hearing Officer, we would like to add Compliance Investigators to ensure that officers are staying informed. Compliance investigators will also be available to answer questions and clarify concerns with those issued citations. Adding in-house hearings is necessary as this process will be conducted and monitored directly by the Waste Management Authority.

In closing I would like to reiterate the goals of the Environmental Enforcement Division:

Division Expansion for around the clock coverage of bin sites and roadways to combat illegal waste disposal during the evening hours, produce more citations to combat illegal dumping, and to provide protection for WMA facilities from arson and vandalism.

Business/Community Education and Information Outreach regarding WMA proper solid, liquid, and special waste disposal policies, regulations, penalties, special collections and employing emergency blast updates.

And last but certainly not least, **In-House Hearings** to determine when and how often hearings will occur, as well as insuring that the fines resulting from these citations are received by WMA. As our public visibility, communication, and outreach increases, our goal is a cleaner more conscious community!

Thank you for allowing me to provide testimony and I am available to answer any questions.