Good morning to the Honorable Steven Payne, Chairman of the committee of Homeland Security, Justice and Public Safety, the legislative body and staff, co-testifiers, members of the Virgin Islands Police Department (VIPD) executive team, and to the members of the listening and viewing audience. My name is Trevor Velinor, Police Commissioner of the Virgin Islands Police Department. I am pleased to offer an update on VIPD’s operations and overview of initiatives to reduce crime, improve police operations, build trust, increase community engagement, and improve recruitment and retention in the territory.

VIPD’s mission is to protect the people and property of these United States Virgin Islands. Police Operations has a critical role to maintain public order, enforce the law, and ensure the safety and security of the residents and visitors of the territory. It is essential to develop a community and police partnership in efforts to prevent, detect, reduce, and investigate criminal activities within our community. Therefore, constitutional policing and social justice demand such
relationships to create an environment that fosters growth and sustainability for the Territory. The Department is striving to gain the community’s trust and enhance visibility.

The Department was granted substantial compliance in December 2018. We are scheduled to return to court on February 25th for the evidentiary hearing to determine compliance with the paragraphs of the CD. Although the Independent Monitoring Team have recommended non-compliance for several paragraphs, the court will ultimately make the compliance determination.

The implementation of special operations as extensions of the Virgin Islands Crime Initiative (VICI) has been rewarding in our crime reduction efforts. The VICI began in October 2019. The focus of the initiative is to reduce violent crime using local and federal agencies to disrupt potential criminal behavior by bad actors. Additionally, the VICI proactively utilize intelligence and technology to address community concerns.

The Operation 10-Day Rush on the island of St. Thomas targets the enforcement of moving violations and the removal of narcotics and firearms in our communities. The operation recovered 6 firearms and made 4 arrests in 2020. On the island of St. John, Operation Love City Zero Tolerance saturates the main streets where the sale of illegal drugs and/or illegal activity occurs in plain view. During patrol, officers have recovered two firearms, resulting in two arrests along with the confiscation of narcotics. The inaugural Operation Eagle Eye was strategically organized throughout the territory, to curtail the unlawful discharge
of firearms during New Year’s Eve of 2020. VIPD partnered with local and federal agencies to ensure equitable deployment throughout the districts. The operation produced the recovery of 18 guns, 8 arrests, 12 individuals detained and 8 suspects under investigation. These operations aid in creating a safe environment for our locals and visitors alike through consistent, positive community policing.

The COVID-19 Task Force, comprised of officers from multiple agencies, continue to collectively provide educational information, redirect mass gatherings, encourage social distancing, and enforce other mandates of the executive order. The terms of the operation change frequently as agencies work to ensure safety, while acknowledging the social dynamics of the community.

Operations on Buck Island have led to increased collaboration among the VIPD Marine Unit, DPNR, the U.S. Park Service, and the U.S Coast Guard. We continue to foster relationships to aid in reducing the gap in our limited resources.

The Mobile Command is strategically placed in “hotspots” to reduce immediate response time and provide constant presence for the selected community. It serves as a valuable community resource. The unit has been deployed to the Frederiksted town area to enhance police presence and community engagement. VIPD continues to utilize approaches such as personal interactions with residents, patrons and business owners, business and community town halls, plus social media and radio platforms. We also participate in WhatsApp groups, and foot patrol, to reduce crime in these communities. Our
residents have been receptive and have shared their satisfaction of having law
enforcement presence nearby.

Our crime reduction campaign, “If you see something, say something,” has
become more effective, as the public is being more cooperative in sharing
information. We continue to educate the public of the importance of the
community and the Department remaining unified in the fight against crime.

As a result of National Highway Safety Traffic Administration (NHTSA)
endorsed initiatives, the Traffic Division continues to be proactive in traffic
enforcement. The Territory recorded 32% less traffic fatalities for CY2020 (13),
compared to (19) fatalities in 2019. Vehicular homicides decreased by 43% for
2020 (4) compared to 2019 (7). For 2020, the Traffic Division issued 6,557 traffic
citations, which was a 4% increase from 2019 with 6,318 citations.

The Criminal Investigation Bureau (CIB) is responsive to all major crimes
and work to solve crimes through meticulous investigations. These investigations
are often time consuming and require blending scientific and investigative
evidence to solve cases. CIB works intricately with the Special Operations
Bureau to execute high risk search and arrest warrants, and mobile and static
surveillance. There are weekly operations that strategize enforcement actions and
intelligence gathering in hotspot areas.

For calendar year 2020, the Territory experienced 49 homicides: St. Croix
(27), St. Thomas (20) and St. John (2) with a total of 21 arrests. During the same
period in 2019, there were 43 homicides and a total of 18 arrests: St. Croix (22),
St. Thomas (21) and St. John (0). In comparison, there has been a 14% increase in homicides for CY2020. Approximately 63% of the homicide victims have been among the age group of 18 – 29. The weapon of choice in almost all homicides were firearms.

In collaboration with the Virgin Islands Port Authority Police, VIPD has opened its Firearms Substations at the Henry E. Rohlsen and the Cyril E. King Airports. Passengers entering our Territory must immediately declare their firearms at the respective substation. VIPD is developing a Memorandum of Agreement with the Virgin Islands Port Authority and our airline partners to combat the flow of illegal firearms into the territory.

VIPD recorded 301 arrests for Part I Crimes for CY2020 compared to 307 arrests for CY2019. In CY2020 there were 91 robberies reported compared to CY2019 there were 48 incidents. For CY 2020, we received 799 Domestic Violence calls for service (536 St. Thomas/St. John and 263 on St. Croix) and in CY 2019, we received 643 Domestic Violence calls for service (362 St. Thomas/St. John and 281 on St. Croix). This reflects a 24% increase of DV related calls. There were 177 DV arrests in 2020 (81 on St. Thomas/St. John, and 96 on St. Croix). In 2019, there were 198 arrests (69 on St. Thomas/St. John and 129 on St. Croix). This reflects a 11% decrease of DV arrests.

There were 80 shooting assaults in CY2020 compared to 64 in CY2019. In CY2020, there were 19 arrests: St. Croix (10), St. Thomas (8) and St. John (1)
compared to CY2019, 23 arrests: St. Croix (13), St. Thomas (10) and St. John (0).

The Virgin Islands Police Department is proud to announce the obligation of $20,160,897.05 of the disaster recovery funds. We continue to work with FEMA, Ernest and Young, Witt O’Brien, the Office of Disaster Recovery and VITEMA to be reimbursed for funds expended following the 2017 hurricanes.

VIPD continues to monitor overtime. Employees require the approval of the manager at the Chief or Deputy Commissioner’s level. The Department expended $13,591,857 in overtime in FY2020. For the first quarter of FY2021, $3,614,144 has been expended in overtime compared to $3,029,113 for the same period in FY2020, and $4,769,895 for the same period in FY2019.

The Bureau of Human Resources is committed to providing efficient services that supports the employees of the Virgin Islands Police Department as well as the Department’s strategic and operational goals. Our recruitment strategy focuses on making sure the right persons are hired to support the mission of the VIPD. In this regard, we have embarked on two recruitment initiatives that will help strengthen our manpower.

The first initiative re-introduces the Police Auxiliary position, which will focus on utilizing an on-the-job training assessment. The criteria establishes that those who satisfactorily complete a probationary, one year of service and wish to become a full-time police officer, will be recommended to return to the Police
Training Academy to complete the necessary training to be granted Police Officer status.

The second initiative is the Community Service Officer (CSO), in which 30 positions have been allocated and funded by the CARES Act. The Community Service Officer performs a wide variety of non-sworn law enforcement duties in support of Police Operations as well as COVID related patrol tasks. This position serves as a bridge for those who have an interest in law enforcement to gain the necessary experience and understanding of the Police Department before applying to become a Police Officer. We will begin interviews of the 19 applicants next week.

The hiring process of a police officer is designed to select candidates that meet the highest standards of this demanding career. Candidates must pass a comprehensive hiring process involving a prescreening, police entrance examination, oral board interview, physical ability test, background investigation, psychological evaluation, and medical evaluation before being allowed to enter the Police Training Academy as a Police Recruit.

As of February 2021, Human Resources in the St. Thomas/St. John district is processing 6 Police Officers in addition to nine 9 Police Auxiliary candidates. In the St. Croix District, 7 Police Officers and seven Police Auxiliary candidates are being processed. These individuals will be taking part in the Police Training
Academy, commencing on February 22, 2021 in both districts. The Police Auxiliary class is anticipated to start in March 2021. The average age of our police force is 42, with 56% being males and 44% females.

As we continue to increase the use of technology, our crime analysts are receiving essential training in multiple software platforms to enhance their analytical capabilities and resources, which are utilized to analyze crime patterns, identify trends, and link incidents and suspects. The ShotSpotter system went live late June 2020 in the Territory. Officers are now able to receive real-time alerts on the location of gunfire. The current phase of the ShotSpotter coverage has been very helpful in dispatching officers, nonetheless, the territory needs an additional 5 square miles of coverage. The Department is diligently researching for additional funding sources to expand the ShotSpotter system. In addition, the Department has an approved drone policy to support the implementation of drones. Employees have been trained and eager to incorporate the use of drone technology to work in tandem with ShotSpotter, aid the Marine, and other special units. The technology will improve the visibility of our officers, offer better vantage points, and strengthen our tactical resources.

The camera surveillance system will be completed by July 2021. The vendor is currently in the territory and working on the installation. The first phase of the camera system will be comprised of 104 cameras to be installed throughout the territory. The camera surveillance system will provide the Department with
the ability to assist with crime prevention, traffic patterns/violations, and crime solving.

The Spillman Records Management System (RMS) has been installed and live at this time. This will be the foundation for our technological enhancements to propel us into the 21st century. RMS will be utilized to automate the process of creating, approving, disseminating, and managing reports, while allowing all first responder agencies to share information in an efficient process.

A security awareness platform is being developed to aid users with training and education on the various vulnerabilities that could compromise their computers. Additional technological work is being conducted to upgrade and fortify the existing network infrastructure, which will provide a complete business continuity design to minimize the risk of downtime. VIPD has 221 vehicles equipped with Global Positioning Systems (GPS) to aid in accurate geographical locations to ensure officer safety. The request for proposal (RFP) process for the Body Worn Camera (BWC) project has been completed. The implementation of the BWC is in the contract approval process stage.

I would like to take this time to thank the Committee Chair, Honorable Steven Payne, along with the other senators and staff who participated in the tours of our facilities in St. Thomas/St. John and St. Croix districts. I believe in transparency and you were able to witness the conditions of our buildings. VIPD is in need of additional funding for ballistic equipment and a safe, professional environment to call our own. While VIPD is thankful for land or buildings to be
donated, I humbly request funding to be allocated for those capital projects. Additionally, the Department continues to pursue federal funding to renovate the Patrick Sweeney Headquarters and establish a headquarters on the island of St. Thomas. We want to see our employees in a state-of-the-art law enforcement complex. An extension of the command station is the mobile command unit. The mobile command office is used as a crime prevention asset. The Department is in need of one mobile command office in the St. Thomas/St. John district. Additionally, I will continue to advocate and search for funds for the St. Thomas/St. John District Motorpool. A Motorpool that is equipped and fully functional is critical for the maintenance of our mobile assets, aiding our men and women to perform their duties. The current facility is a shared space and needs significant repairs. St. Thomas will require a safe, efficient, and easily accessible facility. VIPD was awarded a Maintenance Assistance Program (MAP) grant in the amount of $85,000; however, we continue to seek additional funding.

The VIPD Community Engagement survey conducted in 2020 offered the opportunity for the community to share opinions, suggestions, and perspectives on policing in the territory. Two key takeaways from the survey revealed 52% of the respondents feel there is a need for more police presence, while 26% feel officers do not care about the community. The full survey is available upon request.

Our Crime Prevention Bureau continues to engage with the community by spearheading events, which further the mission of awareness, service, and
prevention. VIPD is striving to prevent crime and build trust while promoting opportunities for the young population.

The active Crime Prevention programs are the Explorers, Police Athletic League (PAL), and Weed and Seed. VIPD has also partnered with the Department of Education to bring the Teens and Police Service (TAPS) Academy to our students, scheduled to begin in March. During Red Ribbon Week (dedicated to educating the community about drugs) in October 2020, several partners to include the Department of Education collaborated to provide an event filled week for students and residents. The events entailed virtual sessions for worship service, special messages from Department heads and small competitions for the youth. The Bureau has been working to obtain more support with the Police Athletic League and the Weed and Seed programs for the territory.

VIPD is the flagship law enforcement agency in the Territory, responsible for protecting our people and property. We value our roles as public servants to the Territory and will continue to serve and promote professionalism, accountability, and effective communication. We remain steadfast in accomplishing our strategic goals: to reduce crime with a comprehensive approach, improve operations by consent decree compliance, build trust in the community by increasing community engagements, and strengthen our workforce with enhanced recruitment to attract quality professionals. We are St. Croix District, we are St. Thomas/St. John District, we are VIPD, and we will be better. I extend thank you to the Honorable Governor Albert Bryan Jr. and the
administration for their continued support to public safety. I thank this body for the opportunity to testify. My team and I standby to answer your questions.