

**THIRTY-SIXTH LEGISLATURE OF THE
U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS
COMMITTEE ON CULTURE, YOUTH, AGING,
SPORTS, AND PARKS
Chairman: The Honorable Angel Bolques, Jr.**

Virgin Islands Police Department

St. Croix, USVI

October 31st , 2025

Good morning to the Chair, The Honorable Angel Bolques, Jr., Legislative body and Staff, Members of the VIPD Team, and to the listening and viewing audience. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Sergeant Danisha Samuel-Santos, Commander of the Juvenile Bureau for the district of St. Croix. Today I am accompanied by Detectives Jahbari Burton and Jernings Abraham over in the St. Thomas-St. John District. We appear before you today on behalf of Police Commissioner Mario M. Brooks and the Virgin Islands Police Department (VIPD) to discuss the urgent issue of youth violence in our community and the Department's ongoing efforts to promote safety, healing, and opportunity among our young people.

Introduction

The escalation of youth-involved violence in the Virgin Islands represents

more than a law enforcement concern, it is a multidimensional social challenge that affects schools, families, and institutions across our territory. At the VIPD, we recognize that young individuals exposed to trauma and community violence require more than protection; they need understanding, guidance, and support. Our mission extends beyond enforcement to encompass prevention, intervention, and collaboration with our partners in education, behavioral health, and community service organizations.

Crisis Response and Trauma-Informed Practices

When responding to incidents involving youth, VIPD officers are trained in de-escalation and crisis intervention techniques designed to ensure safety while avoiding unnecessary arrests. We have adopted diversion-based practices that connect young people to appropriate services rather than to the criminal justice system whenever possible. This approach is particularly critical for youth who have experienced trauma, as punitive measures often reinforce cycles of harm.

Our Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) works closely with the Department of Health and behavioral health professionals to ensure timely referrals for counseling, mental health care, or substance use treatment. These collaborations allow us to meet youth where they are, addressing the root causes of their behavior rather than solely its consequences.

Partnerships with Schools and Behavioral Health Providers

The VIPD maintains consistent engagement with the Department of Education and school administrators throughout the district. Our School Resource Officers (SROs) serve not only as security personnel but also as mentors, mediators, and trusted liaisons who help bridge the gap between students, schools, and support systems. Through our partnerships with behavioral health providers, we are able to identify and intervene early with students who exhibit signs of distress, conflict, or exposure to violence. By doing so, we can de-escalate tensions before they become crises and help students develop healthier coping and problem-solving skills.

Community Policing and Youth Engagement

Prevention remains central to our strategy. Through the Police Activities League (PAL), we create safe, structured spaces where young people can engage in recreational, cultural, and leadership activities. Our Police Cadet Leadership and Development Program equips participants with discipline, civic awareness, and pathways toward careers in law enforcement and public service.

Additionally, the Weed and Seed Initiative integrates community policing with social service outreach and neighborhood revitalization to reduce crime and strengthen community trust. These programs are more than extracurricular activities, they represent environments that foster belonging, self-worth, and trust

in public institutions. By promoting emotional resilience and a sense of purpose, we help break the patterns of alienation that often precede violent behavior.

Challenges and Recommendations

Despite progress, significant challenges persist. Reaching youth most at risk is often hindered by limited interagency coordination and insufficient resources to sustain long-term intervention efforts. Many grassroots organizations that effectively engage youth struggle with consistent funding and organizational capacity. Meanwhile, for the VIPD, balancing enforcement responsibilities with the intensive demands of community engagement continues to stretch available personnel.

To strengthen our collective response, the VIPD recommends:

1. Formalizing interagency protocols to improve coordination in crisis response, referrals, and follow-up care for at-risk youth.
2. Increasing investment in school-based behavioral health services to ensure timely and effective intervention when youth experience mental or emotional crises.
3. Expanding funding for prevention, mentorship, and leadership programs that provide meaningful alternatives to street violence.
4. Enhancing officer training in trauma-informed care and youth development to ensure consistency and empathy in all youth interactions.

Conclusion

The Virgin Islands Police Department remains steadfast in its commitment to interrupting cycles of harm and guiding our young people toward safer and more hopeful futures. We recognize that enforcement alone cannot solve the problem of youth violence. It requires a holistic approach grounded in prevention, intervention, partnership, and trust.

Our young people are not only the victims of today's violence, they are the potential leaders of tomorrow. By working together, across law enforcement, education, behavioral health, and the community, we can ensure they receive the safety, support, and opportunities they deserve.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome your questions and look forward to continued collaboration on this vital issue.

Appendix A: Juvenile Case and Detention Statistics (CY 2020–2025)

Total Cases: 846

Total Detained: 249