

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, HOSPITALS  
AND HUMAN SERVICES

**BILL NO. 31-0005**

**Thirty-first Legislature of the Virgin Islands**

**February 4, 2015**

An Act creating the Virgin Islands Comprehensive Crime and Public Health Task Force

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**PROPOSED BY:** Senator Janette Millin Young

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1       **WHEREAS**, criminal activity, particularly those related to violence, drugs, and alcohol,  
2       create a high level of direct and indirect health care costs; and

3       **WHEREAS**, according to the National Center for Disease Control, there are roughly  
4       51,000 violent deaths in the United States as of 2005, with direct economic costs of over \$47  
5       billion annually in medical costs and loss of wages (production), thus amounting to a loss of  
6       roughly \$1 million for each violent death; and

7       **WHEREAS**, for every young person killed by violence, 20 to 40 receive injuries that  
8       require hospital treatment; and

9       **WHEREAS**, in 2004, more than 750,000 young people aged 10 to 24 were treated in  
10       emergency departments for injuries sustained due to violence; and

11       **WHEREAS**, victims of violent crimes are much more likely to be future victims of  
12       violent crimes; and

1           **WHEREAS**, victims of violent crimes are predisposed to further physical and emotional  
2 illnesses that further impact on their quality of life and present further public health costs; and

3           **WHEREAS**, the indirect costs to the health and well-being of the community extend far  
4 beyond direct costs; and

5           **WHEREAS**, many studies have linked the amount an individual walks, with actual or  
6 perceived safety, where safety includes freedom from crime and freedom from pedestrian injury;  
7 and

8           **WHEREAS**, fear of crime limits mobility or physical activity in a neighborhood, and  
9 thus inhibits social interactions; and

10          **WHEREAS**, crime in neighborhoods causes fear, stress, feeling unsafe, and poor mental  
11 health; and

12          **WHEREAS**, in a study in Greenwich, London, the participants who reported feeling  
13 unsafe to go out in the day were 64% more likely to be in the lowest quartile of mental health;  
14 and

15          **WHEREAS**, for every dollar spent on addiction treatment programs, there is an average  
16 of \$4 to \$7 benefit to society in the form of reduced incarceration rates and associated costs of  
17 crime while conversely, one dollar spent on traditional incarceration results in only a thirty seven  
18 percent benefit to society in reduced drug-related crime; Now, Therefore,

19 ***Be it enacted by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands:***

20          **SECTION 1.** There is established under the Law Enforcement Planning Commission,  
21 the “Comprehensive Crime and Public Health Task Force” comprised of the following agency  
22 heads and persons appointed by their respective agency or heads having direct program  
23 responsibilities for areas relating to crime, public health and related fields:

24                   (1)     The Commissioner of Police or designee;

25                   (2)     The Attorney General of the Virgin Islands or designee;

- 1           (3)    The Presiding Judge of the Superior Court or designee;
- 2           (4)    The Commissioner of Health or designee;
- 3           (5)    The Commissioner of Human Services or designee;
- 4           (6)    The Commissioner of Education or designee;
- 5           (7)    The Commissioner of Labor or designee;
- 6           (8)    The Chairman of the Central Labor Council;
- 7           (9)    The President of the St. Thomas/St. John Chamber of Commerce;
- 8           (10)   The President of the St. Croix Chamber of Commerce;
- 9           (11)   A representative from the Christian Council of Churches; and
- 10          (12)   The Administrator of the Law Enforcement Planning Commission, who
- 11 shall serve as its secretary.

12       **SECTION 2.** The Task Force has the following powers and duties to:

- 13           (1)    Examine, for the Virgin Islands, the direct and indirect public health costs
- 14 that violent crime and alcohol and drug-related crimes present to the Virgin Islands
- 15 community;
- 16           (2)    Examine and evaluate current and potentially useful preventative and
- 17 ameliorative measures to reduce the incident of the above-mentioned crimes;
- 18           (3)    Conduct cost-benefit analyses comparing the costs of preventive measures
- 19 to the cost of criminal prosecution and punishment as well as the public health costs
- 20 arising from various offenses;
- 21           (4)    Identify geographic areas in the territory where there are concentrations of
- 22 public health issues and incidents that impact on each other in a particularly intense
- 23 fashion, and designate them as areas of particular concern;

1           (5) Propose comprehensive strategies, including prevention, community  
2 design, and law enforcement, to address the public safety and public health issues that  
3 exists in the designated areas of particular concerns;

4           (6) Publish an initial report of its findings, no later than nine months after the  
5 enactment of this Act, detailing the public health costs of violent and drug and alcohol-  
6 related crime, examining cost-effectiveness of various preventive measures, and allowing  
7 for a one-month period of public comments to its findings;

8           (7) Coordinate, on an ongoing basis, the activities of various agencies and  
9 community groups involved with public safety and public health in order to maximize the  
10 effectiveness of crime and public health initiatives;

11           (8) Transmit to the Governor of the Virgin Islands and the President of the  
12 Virgin Islands Legislature a Final Report, no later than twelve months after the enactment  
13 of this Act, on the effects of crime and public health initiatives, demonstrating the effects  
14 of government measures on criminal activity; public health cost-savings to be realized;  
15 and, recommending specific measures for adoption and implementation by the  
16 Government of the Virgin Islands;

17       **SECTION 3.** The Law Enforcement Planning Commission shall provide administrative  
18 and financial resources to the Task force to carry out the purpose of this Act, but each agency  
19 represented shall use its non-monetary resources as necessary and prudent to execute its  
20 respective responsibilities under this Act. The Task Force shall use free internet-based  
21 teleconferencing wherever practical and necessary to avoid the need for inter-island  
22 transportation to meetings.

23       **SECTION 4.** No later than thirty days after the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall  
24 call an organizational meeting of the Task Force, whereby a Chairperson is elected, including the

1 designation of any other officers and operating procedures deemed necessary to carry out the  
2 mission of this Act.

3 **SECTION 5.** This Act shall remain in effect for four years after enactment but by voice  
4 vote a majority of the members may extend the effective date of the Task force for an additional  
5 two years.

6 **BILL SUMMARY**

7 This Bill establishes the Virgin Islands Comprehensive Crime and Public Health Task  
8 Force comprised of members of the executive, judicial and legislative branches of the  
9 Government.

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11 The powers and duties of the Task Force is contained in section 2 of the Bill and section  
12 3 makes it clear that there will be no funding except for the resources already existing within  
13 each agency whose membership comprise the Task Force.

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15 Section 4 provides the timeframe within which the first meeting shall occur and a  
16 chairperson elected and Section 5 sets a sunset clause.

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20 **BR15-0019/January 16, 2015/YLT**

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