

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, HOSPITALS
AND HUMAN SERVICES

05/04/16-REPORTED OUT TO THE COMMITTEE ON RULES AND JUDICIARY
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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

PROPOSED BY: Senators Janette Millin Young and Nereida Rivera O'Reilly

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

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

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

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

WHEREAS, victims of violent crimes are much more likely to be future victims of
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;

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SECTION 4. No later than thirty days after the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall 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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