

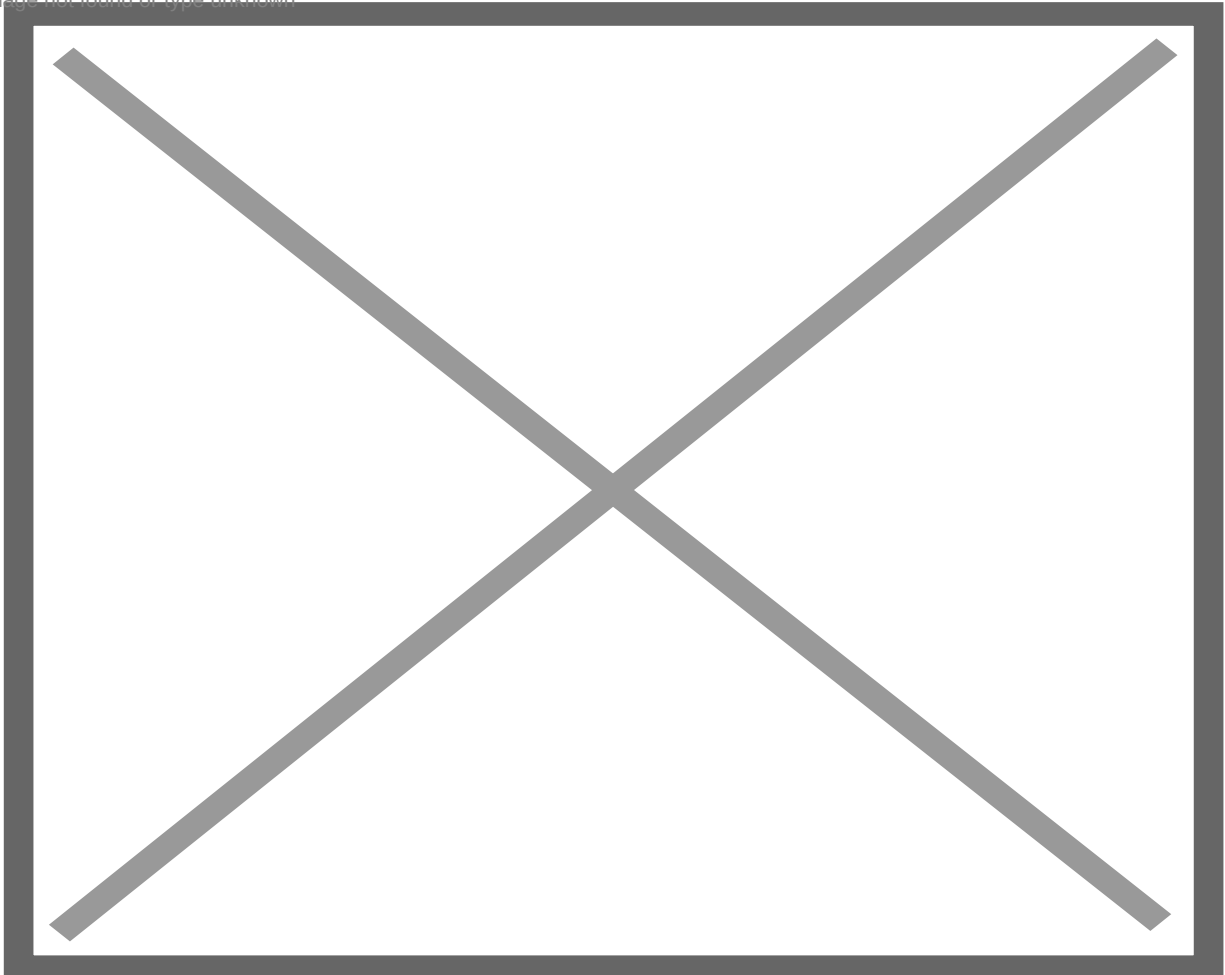
Police Chief Says Swift Action in Killing of Officer Charles Was Not Favoritism, Acknowledges 15 Murders and One Arrest on St. Croix

St. Croix Police Chief Uston Cornelius said the swift apprehension of persons of interest in Officer Eustace Charles's killing resulted from evidence, public tips, investigative work and technology—not favoritism—as he cited 15 murders and 1 arrest on STX

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Executive Security Officer Eustace Charles, whose fatal shooting prompted a swift police response and renewed public questions about the pace of unresolved homicide investigations across the territory.

ST. CROIX — St. Croix District Police Chief Uston Cornelius on Thursday addressed public concern over the rapid apprehension of persons of interest following the killing of Executive Security Officer Eustace Charles, saying the response was driven by the evidence, community information, investigative work and technology available in that case—not preferential treatment.

In a video statement published on the V.I. Police Department’s Facebook page late Thursday afternoon, Cornelius also acknowledged the wider frustration surrounding unsolved homicides, saying “15 murders and one arrest” is not a result he accepts or expects the public to accept.

“Yes, persons of interest were apprehended very quickly. I am grateful to the community for the timely information that was passed on, and for the swift response from our officers and partnering agencies,” Cornelius said.

Officer Charles, 51, was [found inside a vehicle with multiple gunshot wounds](#) in Williams Delight early Sunday after the 911 Emergency Call Center received a report of shots fired at approximately 5:50 a.m. A member of VIPD’s Executive Security Unit, he was assigned to Lt. Gov. Tregenza Roach’s security detail. VIPD and the Federal Bureau of Investigation launched a joint investigation.

Gov. Albert Bryan Jr. later said Officer Charles was [blocked and ambushed](#) by several individuals while leaving home to report for duty. The governor said police surveillance cameras helped investigators identify and track vehicles connected to the attack, leading to the apprehension of persons of interest, the confiscation of firearms and the execution of search warrants.

Cornelius said he understood why that rapid progress prompted questions from residents whose relatives’ killings remain unsolved.

“I also realize that many questions are being asked by members of the community, and one of those questions are if individuals can be picked up so swiftly when an officer is the victim, why haven’t we seen the same result when the members of our community is a victim?” he said. “This is a fair question, and as chief of police, I will not dismiss it.”

“Let me be clear: the life of a police officer is not more valuable than the members of our community. Every mother who has lost a son or daughter, every child who has lost a parent, and every family still awaiting answers deserve justice.”

Cornelius said the developments in the Charles investigation resulted from the particular circumstances surrounding the case.

“It was a combination of circumstances, available evidence, rapid information sharing from the community, coupled with investigative work and technology that allowed for law enforcement to identify and locate persons of interest.”

He cautioned, however, that surveillance systems cannot replace information from residents.

“Technology, however, cannot solve every case by itself. Cameras provide a vehicle description, direction of travel, clothing, and other pieces of information, but we still need information from our people, our residents. Remember, each case presents a different set of circumstances.”

Turning to the territory’s unresolved homicides, Cornelius acknowledged the pain of families who continue to wait for answers.

“I recognize that families are hurting. 15 murders and one arrest is not a statistic that I am satisfied with, and I would never ask the community to be satisfied with it either. Behind every number stated before is a family waiting for closure.”

“To the families waiting for justice, I cannot promise you that the cases will be solved overnight, but I can promise you that the cases are being worked on. We are awaiting that detail that would allow for closure.”

Cornelius said the department must investigate each killing without distinction and should be held accountable to that standard.

“Your family member is not less important because they do not wear a badge. Our responsibility is to protect and serve the territory without distinction and without favoritism. That is a standard that I expect from this department, and that is a standard by which I expect the community to hold us accountable.”

He concluded by again urging residents to share information that could advance unresolved cases.

“Territorially, we still have work to do. We know it, and we are committed to doing it. Community, please, if you have information, no matter how small, pass it on so we can give these families closure. Help us to help you.”