

Task force rewriting sex offender registry

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ST. THOMAS — Officials from law enforcement are working to upgrade the way they keep track of sex offenders in the Virgin Islands. The territory has until July to comply with federal rules established back in 2006.

Local members of the SORNA Task Force recently completed a seminar on meeting the requirements of the Sex Offender Registration Notification Act. All U.S. states and territories are required to enact the requirements spelled out in the act by July.

The notification act creates a unified standard for apprehending, tracking and monitoring registered sex offenders. There are currently 60 sex offenders registered in the territory.

The two-day compliance seminar, led by Attorney General Vincent Frazer, was held last week at the Wyndham Sugar Bay Resort. Much of the work done at the seminar was re-writing the local sex offender law.

SORNA task force members include representatives from the Office of the Governor, the Virgin Islands Police Department, the U.S. Attorney's Office, the U.S. Marshal Service, the Bureau of Corrections, the VI Department of Health, VI Department of Human Services, the Superior Court, the Office of Probation and Parole and the Sexual Registry Board.

"Since July of 2009, the Virgin Islands SORNA Task Force, spearheaded by Attorney General Vincent

F. Frazer, has been meeting regularly and working diligently to develop the appropriate language to amend the territory's existing Sex Offender Registration Statute to meet SORNA requirements by the imposed deadline," said VI Department of Justice spokesperson Sarah Lezama.

Under the new rules, offenders will be classified according to the severity of their crimes. The harsher the offense, the longer the offender will be subject to scrutiny. Those who commit the most severe crimes will be monitored for life. Others will be assigned to terms of 15- to 25 years.

The range of offenses on the Justice Department go from unlawful sexual contact and statutory rape, where the victim is under the age of consent; to rape of a child and first-degree rape.

If territorial officials do not meet the July deadline for amending the rules, they risk losing up to 10 percent of federal funding for criminal justice and public safety programs.

Lezama said once the task force finishes amending the language of the sex offender law the changes will be sent for review to Government House and the U.S. Justice Department. Members of the 29th Legislature will also have a chance to go over the new changes before they vote to approve or disapprove.

Citizens who want to view the Virgin Islands sex offender registry can do so by logging onto the VI Justice Department Web site at www.doj.vi.gov.