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CBP Says Immigration Law Applies Fully in USVI; IDs, Permits Don't Prevent Arrest

CBP Director Roberto Vaquero confirms collaboration with ICE and U.S. Attorney's Office to prosecute and deport individuals unlawfully present, regardless of local documentation or employment status.

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An ICE immigration operation in Puerto Rico earlier this year. By. ICE

People who are in the territory without legal authorization to be in the United States will face detention, prosecution and deportation, warns Customs and Border Protection.

According to a statement provided to the Consortium from Roberto Vaquero, Director for CBP Field Operations in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, having locally-issued identification documents is not enough to protect from enforcement action. "It is important to understand that

only the U.S. Federal Government can grant legal status in the United States,” he said. “A state or territory issued driver's license or identification card does not confer legal status.”

His statement comes on the heels of the [arrest of a Haitian national](#) last week. Reports indicate that the individual was in possession of a valid Virgin Islands driver's license at the time of his arrest. However, because he had reportedly initially come to the territory via irregular channels, Lael Pierre is being prosecuted for illegally entering the country.

“Our officers work diligently to determine the legal status of everyone encountered and they will arrest anyone who is illegally present in the United States,” said Mr. Vaquero. In Mr. Pierre's case, officials stated that he had work authorization documents, which are issued on a federal level. However, the Consortium understands that even with such documents in hand, persons who were not officially processed during their initial entry into the country can still be prosecuted for that immigration violation.

Mr. Vaquero makes it clear that Customs and Border Protection officials in the territory will rigorously adhere to the letter of the law in keeping with the Trump administration's efforts to effect mass deportations. “We have been working closely with the United States Attorney's Office and Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Enforcement Removal Operations, to ensure that those arrested are prosecuted and immediately removed from the United States,” his statement said.