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Customs and Border Protection Captures 3 Men Smuggling More Than \$3 Million in Cash Into St. Thomas

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\$3 million in cash seized by CBP during vessel interception in St. Thomas By. CBP

ST. THOMAS — U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Air and Marine Operations (AMO) agents have intercepted a vessel with three men onboard entering Brewers Bay transporting more than \$3 million inside duffel bags, CBP has announced.

“Transnational Criminal Organizations believe that law enforcement has relaxed its vigilance with social distancing and try to exploit this situation,” stated Johnny Morales, Director, Air and Marine Operations for the Caribbean Air and Marine Branch. “Our AMO crews will continue to protect and serve the citizens of Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands even during this

pandemic.”

Jose Ramon Pimentel-Rivera, 29, Jerry Kirkland-Marrero, 29, and Kalihel Ramos de Jesus, 27, all of Puerto Rico, made their initial appearances before United States Magistrate Judge Miller today on a criminal complaint charging all three with concealing more than \$100,000 onboard a vessel outfitted for smuggling, in violation of federal law, United States Attorney Gretchen C.F. Shappert announced.

According to CBP, during the evening of April 21, Marine Interdiction agents (MIA) on patrol on an Interceptor vessel near the entrance to Brewer’s Bay, noticed a vessel approaching without its navigation lights illuminated.

The MIA’s initiated a stop of the vessel by engaging the blue lights. In response, the three occupants of the vessel began throwing duffel bags overboard before coming to a stop.

After the MIA’s boarded the vessel and detained the three occupants, later identified as Pimentel Rivera, Kirkland-Marrero, and Ramos de Jesus, the agents recovered three duffel bags from the water that had been thrown overboard. A fourth duffel bag was discovered on the vessel. Agents estimate that the bags collectively contained at least \$3 million dollars. One of the duffel bags was equipped with a GPS tracker. The vessel, which is registered in Puerto Rico, was outfitted with five fuel tanks.

This case is being investigated by US Homeland Security Investigations (HSI). Assistant United States Attorney Meredith Edwards is in charge of the prosecution.

A complaint is merely a charging document, and it is not evidence of guilt. Every defendant is presumed innocent until and unless found guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law, CBP said.