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Less-Qualified Puerto Rican Favored Over St. Thomas Resident, Claims Race Discrimination in Lawsuit Against Crowley

Allegations of Favoritism and Exclusion: Plaintiff accuses Crowley executives of marginalizing her for a Spanish-speaking manager from Puerto Rico.

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Last week, Kishma Vincent filed suit against Crowley Caribbean Services and Crowley Maritime Corporation, claiming that she was fired on trumped-up charges of alleged mismanagement that were all part of a scheme to replace her with a less-qualified, less-experienced resident of Puerto Rico.

Ms. Vincent, who began her career at Crowley some 20 years ago, was in 2022 named Director of Operations for the Virgin Islands. Her role involved oversight of the Crowley terminal and warehouses, as well as directing local sales and marketing for the company. She supervised a team of 63 employees on St. Thomas and St. Croix, according to the lawsuit.

On the job, Ms. Vincent reported to the company's senior Director of Caribbean Operations Enrique Figueroa and a Crowley Maritime Vice President Salvador Menoyo, both from Puerto Rico.

The two men, the lawsuit alleges, quickly demonstrated their preference for Spanish-speaking managers from Puerto Rico, and moved to marginalize Ms. Vincent almost immediately. She claims that they excluded her from meetings, including a weekly conference call with the company's Caribbean directors. Discussions on topics affecting operations in the territory were allegedly held with her two Puerto Rican subordinates instead of her, and Ms. Vincent was also reportedly left out of company social events including boat trips and dinners.

Even prior to her appointment as director of operations, Ms. Vincent said she was being mistreated by her superiors. She claims that in 2020 Mr. Figueroa expressed regret over hiring her instead of a Puerto Rican, and made comments about his negative perception of the intelligence of the local population compared with that of Puerto Ricans.

Ms. Vincent claims that a meeting between herself, Mr. Figueroa, and Crowley Maritime's Human Resources Director Adam Mason resulted in her termination due to "a lack of leadership and oversight," according to the lawsuit. The reasons cited, she said, were spurious.

One such reason given for her termination was a total of \$300,000 worth of shipping containers that went missing from the St. Croix terminal. These containers, Ms. Vincent said, were reported lost before she took up her post in January 2022, prior to her assuming responsibility for the operations at the St. Croix terminal. An audit ordered by her once she became director, concluded that the containers, 26 in total, had been lost or stolen between 2018 and 2021.

The second incident cited in her termination meeting was her failure to report an employee that had allegedly shown up to work with a firearm in his possession. That worker, Ms. Vincent said, was confirmed not to have a weapon on his person when she confronted him.

As for her third alleged infraction, Ms. Vincent said that she did alert senior company officials that an employee owned a trucking business that created a potential conflict of interest. She told Mr. Figueroa about it, she says, and he directed her to alert Crowley's ethics and compliance department. Ms. Vincent says she did so.

Since her departure from Crowley, Ms. Vincent alleges that while her former position has not yet been officially filled, the duties and responsibilities of the role have been assigned to someone who used to report to her, although he is reportedly less-qualified and less-experienced.

Ms. Vincent is asking the court to award damages including lost pay, and compensation for mental pain and suffering. She is also asking for punitive damages to be levied against Crowley for its alleged "intentional, willful, wanton and malicious" exercise of racial discrimination.

The matter is before the Virgin Islands District Court.

Last week the V.I. Port Authority and Crowley Maritime [signed a new 10-year agreement](#) ensuring continued operations in the USVI.

