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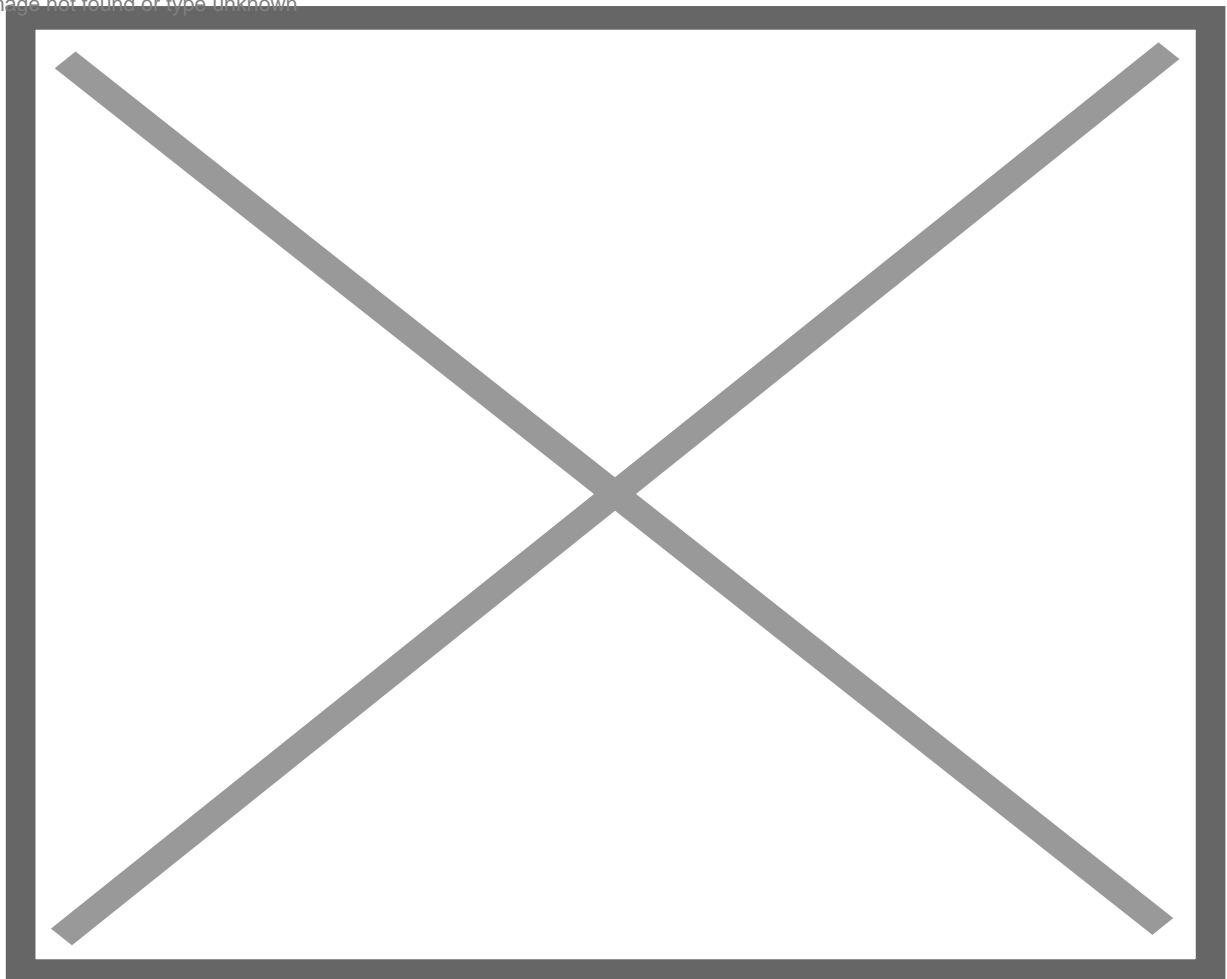
St. Croix Man, 65, Facing Charges for Child Sexual Exploitation

Homeland Security and local police uncover child exploitation in St. Croix

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ST. CROIX — Juan Bermudez, a 65-year-old resident of St. Croix, has been formally charged with several serious offenses, including sexual exploitation of a child, coercion and enticement, second-degree aggravated rape, and second-degree unlawful sexual contact, United States Attorney Delia L. Smith announced.

The charges against Bermudez, if proven, carry severe penalties ranging from a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 to 15 years to the possibility of life imprisonment. The final sentence will be determined by a federal district court judge, who will consider the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines along with other statutory factors.

The investigation leading to these charges was a joint effort by Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) and the Virgin Islands Police Department. Assistant United States Attorneys Rhonda Williams-Henry and Everard Potter are leading the prosecution of this case.

Assistant Special Agent in Charge Eugene Thomas of Homeland Security Investigations emphasized the agency's commitment to protecting children. "Homeland Security Investigations is dedicated to protecting our children and will continue to work jointly with the Virgin Islands Police Department to investigate and pursue individuals who sexually abuse our children," Thomas stated.

In light of the charges, United States Attorney Delia L. Smith took the opportunity to remind the public that an indictment is simply an allegation. As is standard in the American justice system, all defendants, including Bermudez, are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

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