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Bryan Selects Acting AG as Search For Permanent Replacement Continues

Transition to Ian Clement as acting AG follows Ariel Smith's departure amid unspecified disagreements

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Acting USVI Attorney General Ian Clement. By. FACEBOOK

With Attorney General Ariel Smith serving her last day on Friday, Governor Albert Bryan has confirmed to the Consortium that Ian Clement, a deputy AG at the V.I. Dept. of Justice who has been defending the Bryan administration in a suit over the composition of the Water and Power Authority Governing Board, will serve as acting attorney general while the search for a permanent replacement continues.

The reason for the AG's dismissal hasn't been made public, and Mr. Bryan told the Consortium that he would not comment further on the resignation beyond his announcement. Even so, people with knowledge of the matter said Mr. Bryan and Ms. Smith have been at odds for some time over certain directives from the chief executive.

Following his announcement of Ms. Smith as AG in March 2023, Mr. Bryan in his letter to Senate President Novelle Francis asked that the Legislature act expeditiously and favorably on her nomination “to prevent any delays in the official functions of the department.”

Her tenure was preceded by that of Denise George, who had served as attorney general for the entire first term of the Bryan administration. She was dismissed on December 31, 2022 — days after Bloomberg News revealed that Ms. George in her capacity as V.I. attorney general had [filed a lawsuit against JPMorgan Chase](#) — the largest bank in the United States and the world's largest bank by market capitalization — without first informing Governor Bryan of such a major action, said a person with knowledge of the matter.

The lawsuit claimed JPMorgan Chase facilitated convicted felon Jeffrey Epstein's abuse of women and girls, alleging that the bank should have known about Epstein's illegal activity and as part of its anti-money laundering procedures, should have reported their client to authorities. George accused the bank of turning a blind eye to the sex trafficking operations that went on on Epstein's private island in the USVI, Little St. James.

The matter was [settled last September](#), with JP Morgan agreeing to pay \$75 million. Mr. Bryan issued a statement after the settlement, stating, “This settlement marks a significant step in achieving justice and bringing closure to this matter. Most importantly it guarantees JPMorgan will implement and establish anti-trafficking measures to meet their obligation to detect and report financial patterns associated with human trafficking.”

But the lawsuit [unearthed unflattering information](#) about local politicians who were either seeking office or were major players during the Epstein era, and it brought attention to the territory's role in the Epstein saga. Among the most damaging information was from a lawsuit [brought against the territory by victims of Epstein](#), which detailed former First Lady Cecile de Jongh's relationship with the disgraced financier. The lawsuit claimed that Epstein assaulted a victim in hearing range of the former first lady. It also named several former USVI officials as defendants, including ex-Governors John de Jongh and Kenneth Mapp, Congresswoman Stacey Plaskett, former attorney general Vincent Frazer, and former Senators Celestino White and Carlton Dowe.

The USVI is currently embroiled in this litigation. Represented by attorney Jordan Merson, the victims, identified as Jane Does, seek unspecified monetary damages for violations of federal sex trafficking laws. Merson emphasized that the lawsuit aims to hold accountable those responsible for the sexual abuse endured by the women.

Emails submitted as evidence in the lawsuit show that Epstein was a [significant donor to political campaigns](#) and actively lobbied for alterations in sex-offender legislation to serve his interests. Additionally, he had hired Mrs. de Jongh as his office manager and she reportedly served as his political representative, as indicated in the documents presented in the JPMorgan case.

The complaint accuses Epstein of using his influence over government and border officials to manipulate immigration rules and maintain his sex trafficking operation. It alleges that Epstein ensured the entry of two plaintiffs, identified as Jane Doe 2 and 3, into the territory despite their expired visas, demonstrating his significant sway over local authorities.

