

St. Thomas Man Sentenced to 3.5 Years for Fentanyl Possession

Chief District Judge imposes prison term as Virgin Islands confronts potential opioid threats

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ST. THOMAS — A St. Thomas man was sentenced by Chief District Judge Robert Mollow to 43 months in prison for possession with intent to distribute fentanyl. Tahir Donadelle, 43, was sentenced on Monday following an earlier guilty plea.

“Across the United States, opioids, primarily fentanyl, killed over 80,000 people in 2021 alone,” said United States Attorney Delia Smith. “Here in the Virgin Islands, we have thus far been spared the worst of the opioid epidemic, but this seizure of fentanyl by CBP officers shows that we are not immune. Fortunately, the vigilance and dedication of our law enforcement partners led to the interception of these deadly drugs, and we were able to convict those responsible. We will

continue to do everything in our power to keep the Virgin Islands safe from this lethal scourge.”

According to court documents, on September 8, 2022, Donadelle traveled from Atlanta, GA to St. Thomas, and was randomly selected by Customs and Border Protection for a baggage inspection upon arrival at the Cyril E. King Airport. During the inspection, officers discovered 14 vacuum-sealed packages inside Donadelle’s luggage, 11 of which contained marijuana. The remaining three packages contained 964 light blue fentanyl pills bearing “M” on one side and “30” on the other side.

Donadelle is not the first to be sentenced for fentanyl. In 2023, Elijah Hakim was ordered to serve 85 months in prison after a federal jury found him guilty. In the same year, the VIPD reported three deaths related to fentanyl. According to a Department of Justice press release, the deadly narcotic has caused an epidemic in the United States, but documented cases in the Virgin Islands remain low.

“Fentanyl is one of the deadliest drug threats that our nation has ever encountered. Our exceptional frontline officers work tirelessly to ensure this poison doesn’t make it through our borders and into our communities”, said Roberto Vaquero, Director of Field Operations for Puerto Rico and the United States Virgin Islands.

Homeland Security Investigations Assistant Special Agent in Charge Eugene Thomas reiterated that the “Virgin Islands community benefits when we arrest and prosecute those that attempt to smuggle these dangerous drugs into our territory.” This case was investigated by Homeland Security Investigations, Customs and Border Protection and Drug Enforcement Administration and prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Kyle Payne.