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Man Arrested on Gun Charges in St. Thomas Now in ICE Custody as Immigration Crackdown Intensifies

Julnes Orelus was arrested on gun charges after a traffic stop in St. Thomas, but his case was dismissed when ICE agents detained him in court. His arrest comes amid increased federal immigration enforcement in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

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ICE immigration crackdown is currently ongoing across the United States and its territories.

ST. THOMAS — A man's felony gun possession charges were dismissed in court on Monday after immigration officials detained him when he appeared for his advice of rights hearing. This development highlights the increasing presence of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)

agents in the U.S. Virgin Islands amid ongoing federal immigration crackdowns.

According to court documents, in the pre-dawn hours of Sunday morning, officers patrolling Donningens Gade spotted a white Honda CR-V overtake the vehicle in front of it and break the red light at the Strand Gate intersection.

They initiated a traffic stop, and the CR-V came to a halt near the Rothschild Francis Market Square. Police spoke to the driver, Julnes Orelus, and informed him that it was not legal to make a right turn at red lights.

Orelus reportedly initially told police that he was pursuing someone who had struck his vehicle from the rear and fled the scene. However, the inconsistencies in his narrative, plus the lack of damage to his vehicle, made officers doubt his story.

When asked whether he had weapons in the vehicle, he reportedly showed police a knife he had stored in the driver's door. Officers then reportedly noticed a green velvet bag in the center console, which Orelus grasped and pushed down when asked about its contents. After handling the bag themselves, officers determined that the object within was likely a firearm.

A search of the bag revealed the object was indeed a gun, identified by forensic technicians as a Taurus Millennium PT .40 caliber pistol.

Orelus was then arrested and charged with illegal possession of a firearm, illegal possession of ammunition, and failure to stop at a red traffic signal. He was remanded into custody to await his initial court appearance, scheduled for Monday.

At his advice of rights hearing, Magistrate Simone Van Holten-Turnbull did find probable cause to uphold the charges, but chose to dismiss them anyway, citing the fact that Orelus, who is not a U.S. citizen, was being detained by ICE agents present in the courtroom. Orelus is now in the custody of immigration officials, underscoring the federal government's heightened immigration enforcement in the territory.

This latest ICE intervention comes as federal immigration authorities have ramped up efforts in the U.S. Virgin Islands, despite resistance from local leadership. Governor Albert Bryan Jr. has taken a firm stance against ICE operations within the territory, [recently directing](#) all government employees, including those in the Department of Education and local law enforcement, not to cooperate with ICE enforcement efforts.

Governor Bryan's directive, issued on January 29, 2025, stressed that immigration enforcement is the responsibility of the federal government and should not be aided by local authorities. He instructed that government-managed spaces, including schools, remain areas of safety and stability regardless of residents' immigration status. The directive also outlined specific protections:

- Schools must not allow ICE agents to enter school buildings unless they present a warrant signed by a judicial officer. Administrative warrants are not sufficient for entry into non-public spaces.
- ICE agents are prohibited from speaking with students without parental consent, and school personnel must not disclose immigration-related information without a judicial order or

subpoena.

- Any ICE presence on or near school grounds must be reported immediately to superiors, and the Commissioner of Education must notify the Attorney General of any ICE activity.
- Local law enforcement officers are directed not to aid ICE agents in immigration enforcement, as their duty is to enforce territorial laws and protect residents.

"As Virgin Islanders, we celebrate our community's diversity, and we will continue to protect the rights of all our residents," Governor Bryan stated in the directive.

The Trump administration has expanded its immigration enforcement across the United States and its territories, with recent large-scale arrests of undocumented individuals. Federal officials have also proposed lowering immigration detention standards to encourage more cooperation from local law enforcement agencies.

Governor Bryan's refusal to assist ICE places the U.S. Virgin Islands among jurisdictions resisting federal immigration enforcement efforts, aligning with policies implemented by other Democratic-led cities and states. However, this position comes with potential risks, including threats of investigations into state and local officials who obstruct immigration enforcement and the possibility of losing federal funding. Under previous Trump policies, jurisdictions that refused to comply with ICE directives faced financial repercussions, particularly those labeled as sanctuary jurisdictions.