

Immigration Enforcement Ongoing as Dominican National Apprehended After Arriving on St. John

Erick Jefferson Louis Mella was detained by federal agents after stepping off an inflatable boat at Annaberg beach. He admitted to illegally entering the U.S. Virgin Islands from Tortola. His detention status is pending court review.

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ST. JOHN — Last week, Marine Interdiction Agents of the Customs and Border Protection Air Marine Operations apprehended a citizen of the Dominican Republic moments after he stepped off an inflatable boat onto a beach on St. John.

The agents were reportedly on a surveillance operation at Leinster Bay when they spotted a single engine inflatable boat approaching Annaberg beach. They watched as the boat, with the captain

and one passenger on board, came close enough for the passenger to disembark.

As the individual walked off the beach towards the parking lot, agents stopped him for an immigration document check. The man – Erick Jefferson Louis Mella – reportedly disclosed that he was a citizen of the Dominican Republic.

Homeland Security Investigations officials who ran system checks could not find any record of Mr. Mella entering the United States legally, and thus he was transported to Enforcement Removal Operations offices on St. Thomas.

HSI agents say that Mr. Mella admitted to entering the territory without authorization. He reportedly flew from the Dominican Republic to Tortola in the BVI on March 19. The next day, he went to a beach on Tortola where the small boat was waiting. He and the captain then made the trip across to St. John. A family member had paid \$1,200 for the journey, but Mr. Mella reportedly thought that he would be going to St. Thomas. Agents say that he admitted to not pursuing legal channels to enter the United States.

He was ultimately charged with illegally entering the country and remanded into custody. Presiding Magistrate Alan Teague has not yet made a determination on whether Mr. Mella will continue to be detained ahead of trial, or released.