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Wave of New Lawsuits Filed in USVI Against Tobacco Giants and Local Retailers

Three new plaintiffs have joined the growing list of Virgin Islanders suing R.J. Reynolds, Philip Morris, Liggett Group, and local distributors for negligence, fraud, and conspiracy. All cite early exposure to smoking and now suffer health conditions.

Legal / **Published On September 12, 2025 05:41 AM /**

Janeke Simon **September 12, 2025**

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On Wednesday, a raft of civil lawsuits hit the U.S. Virgin Islands Superior Court, all aimed at the same tobacco manufacturers and local retailers as two previous complaints in previous months alleging negligence and malfeasance on the parts of those who profited from the tobacco industry.

The tobacco torts were filed by plaintiffs Marcello Nieves Soto, Edver Bryan, and Valerie Stiles. All are represented by John-Russel Pate, the same attorney who filed an [almost identical](#)

[complaint](#) on behalf of Riise Richards in July, and one for [Dennis Yodzio](#) a few weeks earlier. All the complaints name R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, Philip Morris USA Inc, and Liggett Group LLC, as defendants. Also named as defendants are Island Saints LLC, World Fresh Market LLC, CULUSVI, United Corp, and KAC357.

The three plaintiffs are all in their sixties and had been exposed to smoking throughout their childhood. They began smoking as pre-teens; Mr. Bryan began smoking Kools and Marlboros as early as 10 years old, his lawsuit states. As in the two previous complaints, these plaintiffs they believed the propaganda promulgated by the tobacco companies in the late 1980s and early 1990s – that “smoking and smoke is not dangerous,” and health concerns and proposed regulation was “just over-blown government nanny state protection,” according to the lawsuit.

All three say they are suffering with a smoking-related health condition. Ms. Stiles was diagnosed with breast cancer around 1997 and underwent surgery for mouth and oral cavity cancer 20 years afterwards. Mr. Bryan received a lung cancer diagnosis in 2024, while earlier this year, Mr. Soto had a pacemaker implanted after years of cardiopulmonary issues.

The plaintiffs allege a civil conspiracy on the part of the tobacco companies, and negligence, misrepresentation and fraud by Philip Morris and R.J. Reynolds. They're seeking compensatory and punitive damages in amounts hopefully to be determined following a jury trial.