

The Virgin Islands Consortium

St. Croix Immigration Raids Trigger New Alarm in USVI as Trump Reportedly Pulls Back From Broad Deportation Message

The enforcement action revived immigration fears in the Virgin Islands, with reports of detentions and forceful arrests surfacing just as new reporting suggested Trump has privately questioned whether some deportation measures have become too extreme.

Federal / **Published On March 20, 2026 06:16 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert **March 20, 2026**



Federal agents detain several individuals during immigration raids on St. Croix on Thursday, March 19, 2026. Officials said the operation targeted undocumented immigrants with criminal histories.

ST. CROIX — A new round of federal immigration enforcement on St. Croix on Thursday jolted the territory back into the immigration debate that had flared in the early months of President Donald Trump's return to office, with community reports and [video footage](#) prompting concern, condemnation, and renewed questions about how these operations are being carried out in the U.S. Virgin Islands. In a statement issued Thursday, Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett said her office had reviewed reports and [footage](#) from the island and confirmed that the actions were conducted by Border Patrol agents with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Plaskett said the March 19 actions on St. Croix were “part of an initiative allegedly targeting individuals with criminal records,” but she made clear that the way the operation was carried out has become a matter of concern in its own right. “I am deeply concerned by these enforcement actions and the manner in which they were carried out,” she said. “Regardless of the stated purpose of any federal initiative, I want to be clear: all agents — regardless of their designation — must treat our residents with dignity and respect.”

Her statement landed as the operation triggered strong reaction across St. Croix, where residents reported detentions at multiple locations and circulated video of at least one forceful arrest. Former Senator Samuel Carrion said the operation did not reflect what many people had been told federal enforcement would prioritize. “They said they were going to deport serious criminals, but that’s not what’s happening. The People being arrested are workers, parents, and likely long-time members of our community. These actions are creating labor shortages, hurting families, creating fear, and weakening trust. We must all speak up, support impacted families, and continue to push the federal Government to focus on real solutions such as the “Dignity Act” a bipartisan proposal and reform our immigration enforcement policies. This is about how enforcement is done, not just who is deported.”

Carrion also addressed what he said he saw in one of the incidents. “What we witnessed today is truly heartbreaking. A man on the ground with multiple ICE officers on top of him, including what appeared to be a knee on his neck. Regardless of immigration status, every human being deserves to be treated with dignity and without excessive force. There must be accountability and transparency in how enforcement is carried out in our community.”

What Thursday's operation made plain is that, in the Virgin Islands, immigration enforcement remains both a federal matter and a deeply local one. Earlier this year, Consortium reporting showed the territory already caught between competing pressures: Governor Albert Bryan Jr. in January instructed local government employees not to assist ICE operations, including at schools and in other government-managed spaces, unless proper judicial process was presented, while federal agencies in the territory later pledged full enforcement of Trump's Jan. 20 executive order on immigration.

[In February 2025](#), Governor Albert Bryan Jr. said ICE activity in the territory had not led to any significant jump in deportations, but had created widespread fear, with parents afraid to send children to school and workers — including some who were documented — afraid to go out.

The territory had already seen visible immigration enforcement under Trump this year. Consortium reporting from March 10, 2025 documented an early-morning immigration

raid in Estate Dorothea on St. Thomas, captured on surveillance video, in what the publication described as part of a broader Trump-era crackdown that had reached the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. That report, together with Bryan's February comments that deportations had not significantly spiked, helps explain why Thursday's St. Croix action caught so many people off guard: the broader enforcement posture had remained in place, but the visible tempo had not been constant.

Plaskett's statement also focused heavily on legal protections. She urged Virgin Islanders to know their rights during encounters with immigration authorities and said her office has distributed "Know Your Rights" material in English, Haitian Creole, and Spanish through community channels and social media. She said those materials are intended to help residents understand the protections they still have during encounters with federal agents. "Regardless of immigration status, you have constitutional protections," Plaskett said, adding that being present in the country without appropriate documentation is a civil matter, not a criminal one.

She also said her office will continue monitoring whether there is any significant or increased Department of Homeland Security presence on St. Croix and said residents should contact her office if they experience troubling interactions with federal agents or need help understanding their rights. Her offices, she said, are located at 60 King Street on St. Croix and at 9100 Port of Sale Mall, Port Havensight on St. Thomas, and can be reached at 340-778-5900 on St. Croix and 340-774-4408 on St. Thomas/St. John. She directed the public to plaskett.house.gov and the congressional offices on both islands for access to the Know Your Rights flyers.

Plaskett also tied her response to the broader immigration debate in Washington. She said she has long supported "comprehensive, compassionate immigration reform," including as a cosponsor of the American Dream and Promise Act. She also said she recently joined Congressman Jimmy Gomez in supporting the Make Housing Affordable and Defend Democracy Act (H.R.6390), which she said would redirect \$175 billion allocated to ICE funding, DHS raids, and border militarization toward housing relief.

Carrion, meanwhile, pointed to another bill — the DIGNIDAD (Dignity) Act of 2025, introduced in the House by Representatives María Elvira Salazar and Veronica Escobar — as the kind of alternative he believes should be pursued. [Congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov) identifies it as a bipartisan immigration bill aimed at securing the border and reforming immigration law.

Elsewhere in Washington, the politics around deportation appear to be shifting, even as enforcement continues. The Wall Street Journal reported Thursday that Trump has privately told members of his inner circle that some of his administration's mass-deportation policies have gone too far and may be politically damaging, and that advisers are now steering the public message back toward arresting immigrants with criminal histories rather than promoting broad "mass deportations." That reporting adds another layer to what happened on St. Croix: a local operation carried out amid national signs that even inside Trump's orbit, concerns are growing about how far enforcement has gone and how it is being seen.