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DOJ Clarifies Schooler Bail Position After VIC Reported It No Longer Sought Pretrial Detention

DOJ says it never sought Brian Schooler's release without bail, while VIC's prior report stated prosecutors had withdrawn their pretrial detention request; DOJ says the change was tied to forensic testing needs and Section 3504a's expedited trial schedule

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Mugshot of Brian Schooler. By. THE VIRGIN ISLANDS POLICE DEPARTMENT.

ST. CROIX — The V.I. Department of Justice has issued a clarification saying it never sought Brian Schooler's release without bail, after the Consortium reported last week that prosecutors had withdrawn their request to detain him before trial in the [fatal WMJR Service Station shooting](#).

The Consortium's [June 30 report](#) stated that prosecutors were no longer asking the court to detain Schooler pending trial, based on a government filing that said prosecutors did "not wish to proceed to an expedited trial due to the need to gather all the appropriate evidence and obtain sufficient forensic testing of the evidence." The report also stated that the government said it would not object to Schooler being granted pretrial release. It did not state that DOJ had requested Schooler's release without bail.

In its July 6 statement, VIDOJ said it was clarifying its position regarding the bail proceedings involving Mr. Schooler.

"Contrary to public reports suggesting otherwise," the department said, it "has never sought Mr. Schooler's release without bail." DOJ said Schooler has remained in the custody of the Virgin Islands Bureau of Corrections since his arrest on June 26, 2026.

"It is important that the public has an accurate understanding of what occurred in court," said Attorney General Gordon C. Rhea. "From the outset of this case, the Department has sought conditions that protect the community while ensuring the judicial process is followed. At no time did the Department request Mr. Schooler's release without bail."

Schooler is charged in connection with the fatal shooting of Pedro Melendez Sanes at WMJR Service Station in the vicinity of Sion Farm. He was arrested on charges of first-degree murder, first-degree assault, reckless endangerment, and discharging or aiming a firearm after police said ShotSpotter detected 15 rounds fired and witnesses identified him as the shooter.

According to the Consortium's earlier report, police said a woman at the scene pointed to Schooler and identified him as the shooter. Another individual reportedly told police he had secured Schooler's gun and also identified him as the person who shot Melendez Sanes. Police found Melendez Sanes lying face down near the gas station's eastern corner, unresponsive, with a vehicle nearby and its driver's side door open.

The firearm recovered at the scene was identified by police as a .40 caliber Glock 22. A gas station attendant reportedly told officers that Melendez Sanes approached the entrance to the gas station unarmed and alone before Schooler approached and opened fire multiple times without any exchange of words. A passerby stopped in traffic also reportedly told police he saw Schooler shoot Melendez Sanes, first twice and then additional times after the injured man fell to the ground.

DOJ said that at Schooler's initial Advice of Rights hearing on June 29, prosecutors asked that he be detained without bail under Title 5 V.I.C. § 3504a, which authorizes pretrial detention without bail for individuals charged with first-degree murder who pose a risk to community safety. The court granted that request and remanded Schooler to BOC without bail.

Later that same day, prosecutors withdrew their request for detention under Section 3504a and instead asked the court to establish secured bail conditions. DOJ said the decision was procedural and tied to the statute's expedited trial requirements.

According to DOJ, cases brought under Section 3504a require an expedited trial schedule. Because critical forensic and ballistic evidence needed to be sent off island for testing, the department said additional time was necessary to complete the investigation.

"Accordingly, the Department withdrew its request under Section 3504a not because it sought Mr. Schooler's release—but because proceeding under that statute was incompatible with the time

needed to complete essential forensic testing,” DOJ said. “The Department continued to advocate for strict conditions to protect the public while the investigation moved forward.”

On July 1, the court held a hearing to determine appropriate bail conditions. DOJ said it requested \$1 million secured bail, along with strict conditions that included a third-party custodian, 24-hour home confinement, GPS monitoring, surrender of all firearms to the Virgin Islands Police Department, and other standard conditions of pretrial release.

The court set bail at \$500,000 and imposed those conditions, according to DOJ. A further hearing is scheduled for July 15 to make a final determination regarding pretrial release.

DOJ said Schooler remains incarcerated at BOC, where he has been held continuously since his June 26 arrest.

The department said it remains committed to protecting the community, supporting victims, and pursuing justice with integrity, and said it will continue to prosecute the case while advocating for conditions that ensure public safety and respect the rule of law.

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