

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Chaos At DOJ: "The Governor Will Have Your Head On A Chopping Block For This"

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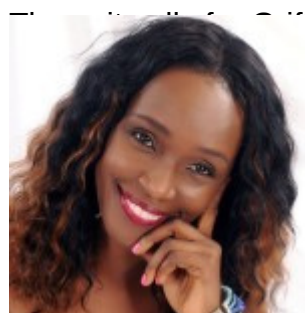
ST. THOMAS -- Assistant Attorney General Denise George-Counts of the Virgin Islands Department of Justice (DOJ) on Thursday filed suit in the District Court of the Virgin Islands calling for sanctions against Acting Attorney General Terri Griffiths for professional misconduct, alleging that Griffiths "purposefully" withheld information and mislead the Court when she filed a motion to withdraw a plea deal that the government, through George-Counts, had reached with the owner of JCK Communications, Jonathan Cohen, in a misdemeanor case involving owed taxes.

The suit sheds light on the ongoing confrontation at the DOJ since [the departure](#) of former Acting AG Soraya Diase-Coffelt and the [subsequent appointment of Griffiths](#),

which was made known to *VI Consortium* through internal letters provided by sources with intimate knowledge of the chaos, addressed to Radio Personality Lee Carl, detailing the department's alleged ongoing dissatisfaction with the acting AG.

In her May 19 motion to withdraw the government's plea deal with Cohen, Griffiths said George-Counts was not authorized to enter into the agreement pursuant to DOJ's "internal operating procedures" requiring the written authorization of Griffiths and the Criminal Chief.

However, in her suit against Griffiths, George-Counts says the acting AG misrepresented the plea bargain procedure and mislead the court "by withholding the material fact that authorization and approval applied to felony cases only and was not required in misdemeanor cases." By doing so, George-Counts added, "Attorney Griffiths has essentially perpetrated a fraud on the court by her dishonesty and misrepresentation in an effort to maliciously undermine me and the integrity of the proper plea bargaining process."



Griffiths to be "severely sanctioned for her professional misconduct."

Assistant Attorney General Denise George-Counts.

Cohen was arrested in April of 2014 on 21 counts of willful failure to pay more than \$10 million in gross receipt, corporate and personal taxes from 2004 to 2010. But the plea deal that George-Counts arrived to with Cohen, which the owner of JKC Communications signed on May 12, enraged Griffiths, who then confronted George - Counts acting "erratic, desperate, hostile and aggressive," according to the suit.

"The first time Attorney Griffiths directed me to withdraw the plea was on May 15, 2015, after it was signed by the Defendant, at which time in a bizarre encounter with her, she repeated *"the Governor is going to have your head on a chopping block for this!"* I had no idea what she was talking about as I had no conversation with the Governor, but I asked her why she did not tell me she had issues with it before now. Her behavior was hostile, aggressive, erratic, sometimes incoherent and somewhat desperate," George-Counts said.

Read the full suit [here](#).

On January 16, people with deep ties to the Mapp administration revealed to *VI Consortium* that DOJ in St. Thomas was in "open revolt" following Governor Kenneth Mapp's selection of Attorney Terri Griffiths as Acting Attorney General of the U.S. Virgin Islands in the aftermath of [the resignation of Soraya Diase-Coffelt](#).

Soon after these people, who requested anonymity because of the sensitivity of the situation, informed *VI Consortium* of the atmosphere at the DOJ, a press release was

issued by the Mapp administration on the same day confirming Griffiths as the governor's new pick as the territory's chief law enforcement officer.

Sources say one of the reasons Diase-Coffelt resigned her post as Attorney General on January 15, after only two weeks on the job, was because she refused to allow Griffiths to join her team. However, Randy Knight, the governor's chief of staff, insisted that Griffiths join the team. In fact, Knight walked Griffiths to the Attorney General's office prior to her appointment, sources told the *VI Consortium*.

Furthermore, a letter from the staff of the Department of Justice, dated Jan. 15, 2015 and addressed to Mr. Lee Carl of WSTA Radio St. Thomas, described the current mood at DOJ, stating that there is "turmoil at the Department of Justice."

DOJ staffers also sent a letter to the Mapp-Potter transition team outlining their grievances.

Both of those letters can be seen [here](#).

The letter to Mr. Carl is also reproduced directly below.

Dear Mr. Carl,

We the employees of the Department of Justice are in a state of shock after becoming aware that our new Attorney General Soraya Diase-Coffelt has resigned after one week. This department, after experiencing eight years of failed leadership, look forward to embracing new leadership and we are truly disappointed that Judge Diase-Coffelt thought it best to leave us. There are many serious issues to be addressed in this department, and we have faith in her abilities, but we understand that she has morale standards that she must adhere to.

We understand that she wanted to make certain changes, but it appeared that some people wanted business to run the same as usual. We made recommendations to her and we believe she was going to make some necessary changes, and she was not given the authority to do what she thought was best for our department.

Politics is hard but we respect that she will not be bullied by others into choosing her managers and some of her staff at the DOJ. Attorney Diase-Coffelt brought in Kevin Rodriguez, who is well qualified, however he is gone because of politics. Solicitor General Bernard Van Sluytman was given a pink slip, and immediately after, we lost an attorney who decided that she couldn't stay after that poor decision. Our Chief Deputy Attorney General, Wayne Anderson, was also given a pink slip and this was another bad decision. Turmoil at the Department of Justice! Who is listening to this department?

We are attaching a letter to the Mapp-Potter transition team that clearly spelled out all of our concerns. We believe that she agreed with our concerns and was about to make tough decisions but she was not allowed to do so. It's a shame.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely the staff of the Virgin Islands Department of Justice.

Griffiths notably represented then-gubernatorial candidate Kenneth Mapp during the 2014 Nov. 4 General Election in a civil suit filed Oct. 30 in Superior Court against Elections Supervisor Caroline Fawkes, St. Thomas-St. John District Board of Elections Chairman Arturo Watlington, Jr., Joint Boards of Election Chairman Alecea Wells, and St. Croix District Board Chairman Adelbert Bryan to prevent the Board of Elections from stopping voters from scanning their ballots in the DS200 voting machines.

The Superior Court [ruled against](#) Mapp; however, on appeal to the Supreme Court, Mapp won the case, granting voters the right to place their ballots into the DS200 machines. Fawkes was [ordered](#) to make the machines available to voters for the Nov. 18 run-off election.

According to Griffiths's [LinkedIn profile](#), she established a firm, Griffiths Law, in 2006 on St. Thomas. It also reveals the various firms the longtime attorney has worked for over the years.

The Mapp administration's announcement of Griffiths's appointment was accompanied by a biography of the lawyer. It reads:

"Attorney Griffiths has practiced law in the USVI since 1996 and has a strong background in Complex litigation, including, fraud, white collar crimes, toxic tort, government relations including zoning, and has handled numerous IRS tax controversies. She has served as a staff attorney for a federal judge in the state of Florida, and a probation and parole officer in three states (IL, SC, and MO).

"Attorney Griffiths is a graduate of Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, where she received her B.S. & J.D., Administration of Justice where she graduated Cum laude. Attorney Griffiths received her Master of Law (LLM) and Taxation degree from University of Florida – Fredric G. Levin College of Law Master of Laws (LLM), Taxation. Attorney Griffiths is a welcomed addition to Governor Mapp's administration."

On Jan. 15, hours after standing with Governor Mapp to announce [the administration's decision to file suit against HOVENSA](#), Diase-Coffelt resigned her post.

According to a press release issued on January 15 by Government House, Diase-Coffelt cited among reasons for resigning, "a staffing conflict with personnel assembled by the administration."

In accepting Diase-Coffelt's resignation, Governor Mapp said, "It is indeed unfortunate that we were unable to resolve the staffing personnel issues prior to this resignation. I wish Ms. Diase-Coffelt well in her future endeavors."

Feature Image: Acting Attorney General Terri Griffiths

Image Credit: Government House

