

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Puerto Rican Men Jailed For Smuggling Cash, Illegal Immigrants, Into USVI

Crime / **Published On September 16, 2016 11:39 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert **September 16, 2016**



ST. THOMAS -- Two Puerto Rican men were sentenced to federal prison on separate smuggling charges, U.S. Attorney Ronald Sharpe announced via press release on Thursday.

District Court Judge Curtis V. Gomez sentenced on September 14, 2016, Angel De Jesus Marrero, 31, pleaded guilty to three months' imprisonment followed by three years of supervised release for encouraging and inducing aliens to illegally enter the United States. Judge Gomez also ordered Marrero to pay a \$100 special assessment and perform 200 hours of community service.

On May 3, 2016, Marrero pleaded guilty to encouraging and inducing aliens to illegally enter the United States. According to the plea agreement, on December 22, 2015, Marrero was solicited by his co-defendant, Rodriguez Ramirez, to assist in the passage of five illegal Brazilian nationals through the St. Thomas airport by checking them in at the airline ticket kiosk. Afterward, he was to ensure that the illegal aliens made it to the appropriate gate to depart St. Thomas for New York. Federal agents, however, thwarted the plan before anyone boarded the aircraft and apprehended the defendants along with the illegal aliens.

This case was investigated by the Customs and Border Protection Office of Internal Affairs and the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Office of Professional Responsibility. It was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Sigrid M. Tejo-Sprotte.

Also on September 14, Ramon Lacen-Santiago, 41, pleaded guilty in federal court on St. Croix to conspiracy to commit bulk cash smuggling.

On March 25, 2012, agents of the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Task Force received information that an individual associated with Lacen-Santiago would be travelling with a large amount of cash through the St. Croix Airport. During a security check of Lacen-Santiago and his co-defendant, a canine alerted on two of their bags. Lacen-Santiago's bag contained \$6,249. A search of his person revealed another \$39,000 in his pockets. Lacen-Santiago told the agents that he was travelling to St. Martin with the co-defendant. A search of his co-defendant uncovered \$38,270 concealed on his person. Neither individual reported the cash as required by law. The co-defendant's trial is pending.

Lacen-Santiago faces up to five years of imprisonment for the offense and a fine of up to \$250,000. A sentencing date has been set for January 13, 2017.

The case was investigated by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Alphonso Andrews, Jr.