

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Two Former D.O.H. Employees Arrested On Embezzlement And Related Charges

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ST. THOMAS -- Two former government employees at the Department of Health Community Health Clinic have been advised of their rights on multiple embezzlement-related charges. [Lou Hermon, 47, of Castleburg, St. Croix, and Kesha Williams, 40, of Sugar Estate](#), appeared before Magistrate Henry Carr III on Wednesday for their initial court hearing.

Assistant Director of the Bureau of Investigation at the V.I. Department of Justice, Special Agent Sehkeria Tyson, executed arrest warrants on the two on Tuesday, charging them each with two counts of making fraudulent claims upon the government; two counts of conversion of government property; two counts of embezzlement by public and private

officers; two counts of buying, receiving or possessing stolen property; and two counts of aiding and abetting. Hermon and Williams voluntarily surrendered to authorities. Magistrate Carr found that there was probable cause to sustain all of the charges and to move the cases forward.

At the time of their arrests, bail for each was set at \$35,000. Magistrate Carr reduced both bail amounts to \$15,000 and allowed Williams to be released from custody by posting an unsecured appearance bond into the third-party custody of her mother. Williams was also ordered to abide by a number of court-imposed bail conditions, which include having no contact with witnesses or victims, including employees at the Community Health Clinic. Bail for Hermon was set at \$15,000 cash or property bond, but Magistrate Carr said he will consider a bail modification if Hermon submits a third-party custodian that the court finds suitable and provides confirmation of where he will be living.

According to an affidavit filed by Special Agent Tyson in support of the arrests, Hermon and Williams worked at the Community Health Clinic on St. Thomas and were responsible for processing clients who applied for health cards. The co-defendants are accused of circumventing the DOH's procedures for distributing the health cards by issuing health cards to clients without having them go through the proper procedural process. In February, Williams admitted that she issued VI food handlers' health cards to individuals without obtaining the necessary medical clearance information and payment for said cards, Special Agent Tyson wrote. Hermon and Williams were terminated in March, according to court records.

Hermon and Williams are scheduled to return to court on Dec. 8 for their arraignment hearing, at which they will formally answer to the charges.

Meanwhile, Attorney General Claude Earl Walker hinted at the possibility that more arrests are likely. "Persons who are currently holding fraudulent cards are aware of that, so they obviously have to know that they are subjecting themselves to the possibility of being charged... with some of the same charges," AG Walker said at a joint press conference held Wednesday afternoon with Department of Health Deputy Commissioner Taisa Phillip-Dorsett.

Walker added, "If you're in possession of a card, you certainly run the risk of being uncovered and also being charged. It's not just a burden on the Department of Health or the employer of a food facility; the actual food handler in possession of these cards also has an obligation to come in and obtain the cards legitimately. There's a reason why these regulations exist – the protocol for washing hands and the requirement that the person provide a bodily sample for inspection – to protect the general public who would go in and have to eat, and we don't want persons getting sick... The holders of these cards also have an obligation to comply with the law." Acting Commissioner Phillip-Dorsett used the occasion to announce her department's plan to develop a new processing system for providing authorized cards territory-wide.

"The Department of Health is taking this opportunity to modernize the processing and the issuing operation of the food-handler card system," Phillip-Dorsett said. "This endeavor is in line with the Commissioner of Health Dr. Michelle Davis' plan to improve the safety and security of all food establishments in the Territory..."

She said that currently there are approximately 12,000 health cards in circulation, which will all be recalled, although there are about 100 that are believed to be fraudulent. New cards will be issued to clients free of cost.

AG Walker reminds the public that any person charged with a crime in the Virgin Islands is innocent until proven guilty by a court of competent jurisdiction.

Feature Image: From left to right: Kesha Williams and Lou Hermon. (Credit: V.I.P.D.)

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