

The Virgin Islands Consortium

V.I.P.D. Intends To Arrest Daily News Reporter On Alleged Trespassing Charge

VIC News / **Published On January 11, 2018 11:45 AM /**

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ST. THOMAS -- Early Wednesday, Government House [issued a release](#) stating that the Mapp administration's executive security unit boss, Gregory Bennerson, had filed a report with the V.I.P.D. concerning a possible criminal trespassing at Government House in St. Thomas. The report was filed after maintenance personnel noted that a window and door had been tampered with, and that the case was under investigation. Government House did not divulge further information.

But in today's Daily News, the paper revealed that one of its staff reporters is at the center of the case, after the reporter "visited Government House on Tuesday to follow up on a tip that the building had been left unlocked and unsecured from theft or vandalism

since Hurricanes Irma and Maria in September."

The paper said it was informed that the V.I.P.D. intends to arrest the reporter, but the publication's attorney, Kevin Rames, expressed confidence that the matter would be resolved in the paper's favor. "The Daily News reporter simply exposed to public view a matter about which we should all be concerned. That is their job," Mr. Rames said, according to the paper. "The Daily News is confident that the charge will ultimately be resolved in favor of the Daily News, a result that would be fully in accord with a balanced and reasoned interpretation of the law."

The reporter, whom the publication did not identify, has agreed to turn themselves in to police at 10:00 a.m. today, at which point the V.I.P.D has said it intends to arrest and charge the reporter, according to the Daily News.

Mr. Bennerson said the building has been closed to the public since the hurricanes and Government House staff has been working in an adjacent building. He said many of the valuables, including much of the historic artwork, were removed from the building for safekeeping following severe damage from the storms. But the Daily News's reporter saw something different, and in a release issued Wednesday, Senate President and historian, Myron Jackson, said he was appalled and saddened by reports of the unknown whereabouts of original Camille Pissarro paintings, and the unattended state of valuable china, mahogany furniture, and other artifacts left at Government House on St. Thomas.

"I am truly dismayed to see the lack of care and attention given to these valuable items representing our heritage," Mr. Jackson said. "While I understand that we are in recovery from two major natural disasters, it appears as though very little effort was made to secure or protect them from any further damage."

Mr. Jackson said the recent reports of the conditions at the building, which serves as the Office of the Governor, are particularly unnerving because he has been working for years to pass legislation to protect what he described as cultural treasures.

The latest proposed measure, Bill No. 32-0024, is an act amending title 3 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 1, section 1 to provide for the position of Curator and amending title 31 Virgin Islands Code to add a chapter 42 establishing the Preservation of Historic Government Collections Act and for other purposes, according to Mr. Jackson.

He said the measure ultimately seeks accountability for the fine and decorative arts of Government Houses throughout the Virgin Islands and provides for a committee to be responsible for the acquisition, removal, care and preservation, and disposal of items in the collection. The language is partially developed from Mr. Jackson's consultation with a curator from the White House in Washington, D.C.

Since last term, Jackson has held senate committee hearings bringing together preservationists, curators, historians, planners and procurement officials to testify on St. Thomas and St. Croix. On October 26, 2016, the bill was held in committee.

"I have been conveying for years that leaving our heritage to be carted away or to rot is not an acceptable practice to display to our visitors, nor to ourselves. The proposed legislation has been criticized as fluff, and many have been unable to see the ways it may have prevented the disheartening conditions we see today," Mr. Jackson said. "As

other states in the nation and around the world place value on protecting their cultural and artistic legacy, we must do the same. It is my hope that our vision is widened.”

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