

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Man Sentenced To 15 Years For Illegal Gun Possession Near School In St. Thomas

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ST. THOMAS -- A St. Thomas man was sentenced Wednesday to 15 years for being found with an illegal handgun during a police operation more than a year ago, V.I. Department of Justice Public Media Officer Corliss Smithen announced Wednesday.

Following a one-day trial in February, a 12-member jury unanimously convicted Shakieme Freeman, 25, of unauthorized possession of a firearm within 1,000 feet of a school zone and unauthorized possession of a firearm in connection with a Feb. 16, 2017, incident at the Thomasville Housing Community close to the Bertha C. Boschulte Middle School, Ms. Smithen said.

Attorney General Claude Earl Walker vowed that the Department of Justice will step up its fight against illegal gun possession in the territory.

“Our battle against illegal guns in the Virgin Islands includes aggressively prosecuting gun cases such as this,” Mr. Walker said, following Freeman’s sentencing. “To that end, we intend to hire more prosecutors to take these gun cases to trial and obtain convictions.”

At Freeman’s trial, 10 Virgin Islands police officers testified for the prosecution. Jurors also saw several photographs, including one which showed a gun tucked inside the front waistband of Freeman’s pants.

According to the evidence presented at trial, a team of officers from the Special Operations Bureau and special response team was involved in an initiative titled, “Italian Job,” and was conducting inspections in the area of the Thomasville Housing Community.

As officers arrived in Thomasville, Officer Vernon Carr testified, they noticed Freeman sitting inside a parked car with one of its doors riddled with bullet holes. Officers approached Freeman and asked him if there was anything they should be concerned about and he replied, “No.”

“He turned and in the waistline of Mr. Freeman was a black gun in a brown holster,” Officer Carr told jurors. “I yelled, ‘Gun.’”

Freeman then took off running, according to Officer Carr. A foot chase ensued until another officer apprehended Freeman and took him into custody. A firearms check revealed that Freeman was not licensed to carry a weapon in the Virgin Islands.

Freeman, who was free on bail pending his sentencing, was immediately remanded into custody to begin serving his prison term.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant Attorney General Eugene James Connor III.