The Virgin Islands Consortium

Woman Gets 5 Years For Embezzling Funds From V.I. Port Authority, Will Serve Only 6 Months In Prison

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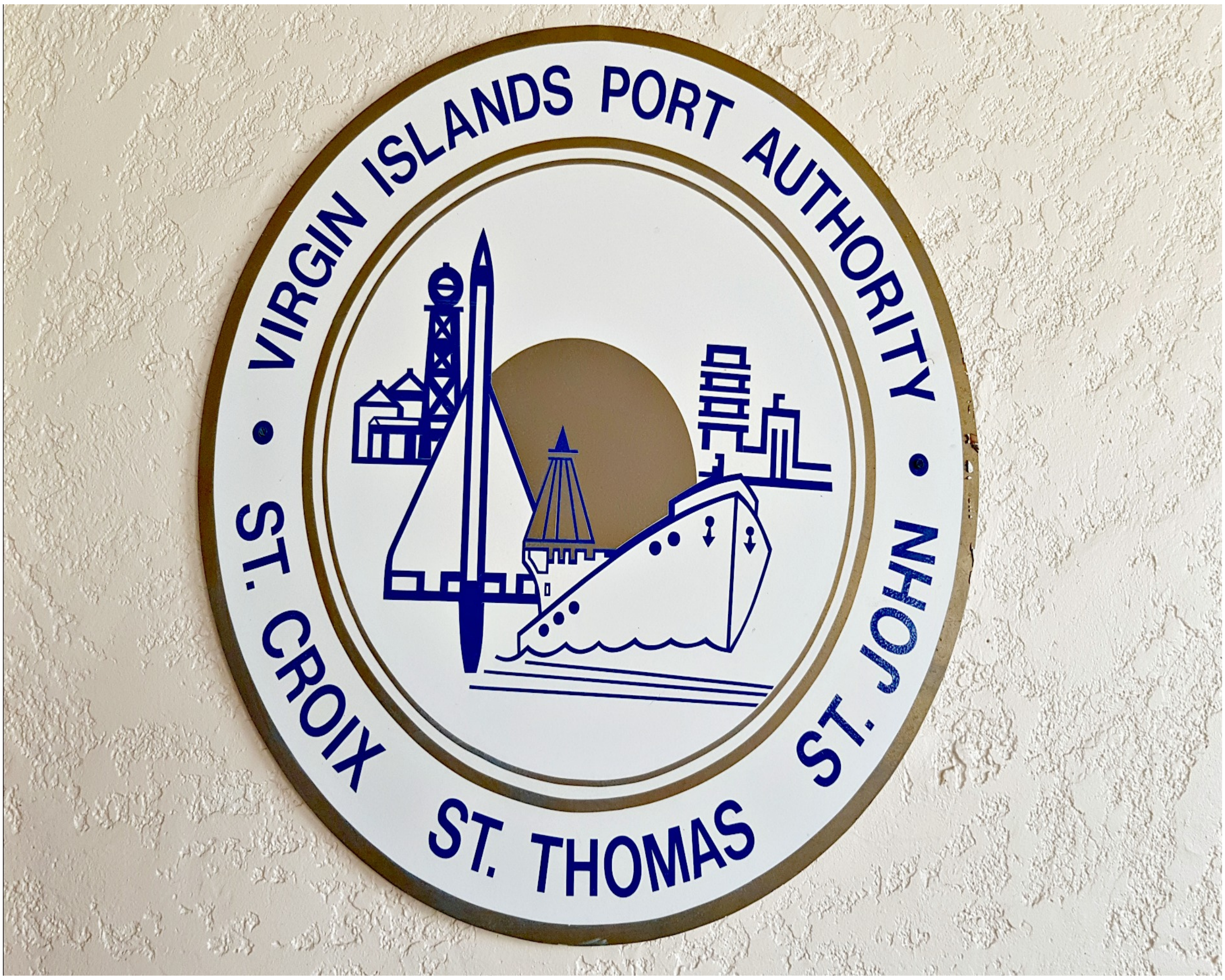

ST. CROIX -- Former V.I. Port Authority employee Lydia Cabret, who stole hundreds of thousands of dollars from the Virgin Islands coffers, was sentenced to five years for her crime, committed while employed at V.I.P.A., Department of Justice Public Media Officer Corliss Smithen announced Wednesday.

Cabret, 54, of La Grande Princesse, stood before V.I. Superior Court Judge Douglas Brady Wednesday morning to be sentenced for embezzling $213,098.58 from the Virgin Islands Port Authority where she worked as a purchasing supervisor.

Judge Brady, who told Cabret that her “pattern of self-serving dishonesty and thievery from the people of the Virgin Islands cannot go unpunished and the people must understand that government employees must honor the trust placed on them,” imposed a five-year prison sentence with all but six months suspended, four years’ supervised probation and standard fees and court costs. Cabret was also ordered to pay full restitution to VIPA, failing which, judgment will be entered against her.

Special agents with the Department of Justice arrested Cabret on Nov. 12, 2015, on a warrant signed by V.I. Superior Court Judge Miguel Camacho and charged her with one count each of embezzlement of public accounts, violating the Criminally Influenced and Corrupt Organization (CICO) Act, obtaining money by false pretenses and unauthorized use of a government credit card after investigations revealed that Cabret used her government-issued credit card to make multiple purchases over a 14-month period. She subsequently pleaded guilty to embezzlement of public accounts.

An affidavit filed by Special Agent Leonardo Carrion details the following:

Virgin Islands Port Authority accounting officials noticed multiple unauthorized transactions on the account statements for the credit card that had been issued to Cabret, which caused the accounting officials to become suspicious and look further into the matter. Investigations revealed that between Feb. 20, 2014 and June 29, 2014, numerous cash advances were made with the credit card issued to Cabret, which were not authorized by the V.I. Port Authority.

On Nov. 10, 2015, a V.I. Port Authority internal auditor told investigators that Cabret was questioned about the numerous questionable credit card charges and cash advances made with the Port Authority credit card and Cabret admitted to using the credit card for personal uses.

“I just want to make it right for all parties concerned and do my best to pay back everything I took,” Cabret told the court at her sentencing.

Cabret, who was free on bail awaiting sentencing, was ordered to report to the Bureau of Corrections Friday morning to begin serving her term of imprisonment. Cabret worked with the Virgin Islands government for 30 years.

“It seems that there’s a real problem with persons misusing government credit or debit cards to pay for personal expenses. This one uses the card to buy jewelry; that one takes it to pay for a vacation,” Attorney General Claude Walker said. “In this case, the defendant used a government credit card to pay for a number of personal items, including to buy car parts for a Mercedes, pay WAPA bills, and purchase items on Amazon. It has to stop. It’s getting disgusting now and I’m completely fed up with this stuff.”

Mr. Walker said these types of conduct only serve to hurt the people of the Virgin Islands.

“What we have to remember is that ultimately, these funds belong to the People of the Virgin Islands. So, the people are paying these bills,” AG Walker said. “VIPA’s governing board and management have made it clear that such conduct will no longer be tolerated at VIPA because it’s a poor reflection on the organization and its dedicated employees.”

Assistant Attorney General Tiffany McLean argued the case for the prosecution.