

The Virgin Islands Consortium

FBI Arrests Puerto Rico Lawmaker and Her Family Members in Corruption Probe Related to Bribery and Kickbacks

Crime / **Published On August 18, 2020 03:35 AM /**

Staff Consortium **August 18, 2020**



Puerto Rico Rep. María Milagros Charbonier

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — FBI agents on Monday arrested Puerto Rico Rep. María Milagros Charbonier after the legislator who once presided over the island's House Ethics Committee was charged in a public corruption case that officials say also involved her son, husband and an assistant.

U.S. Attorney Stephen Muldrow said it was a simple scheme in which Charbonier allegedly received some \$100,000 in bribes and kickbacks after increasing the pay of her

assistant, Frances Acevedo, from \$800 every two weeks to nearly \$3,000, and then received between \$1,000 to \$1,500 in return for every paycheck.

“It wasn’t very complicated,” he said of the alleged scheme that lasted three years, adding that Acevedo on one occasion placed the cash promised to Charbonier in the legislator’s glove compartment at her request.

Muldrow also accused Charbonier of deleting phone messages related to the alleged corruption.

Charbonier, who earned \$2,500 every two weeks as legislator, faces charges including theft, money laundering and obstruction of justice. She pleaded not guilty to all charges as a federal judge set bail at \$25,000.

Charbonier is one of Puerto Rico’s most conservative and religious legislators and once sued in an attempt to ban same-sex marriage on the island. Charbonier has served as representative since her election in 2012 but just lost in Sunday’s primaries. Charbonier also previously served as secretary general for the pro-statehood New Progressive Party.

Also charged in the case is Charbonier’s husband, Orlando Montes Rivera, and her son, Orlando Gabriel Montes. A judge set the husband’s bail at \$25,000, while he agreed to set the son’s bail at \$10,000 unsecured at the request of his attorney, who said he is 23 years old and had just started work as a teacher.

“His parents are unable to assist because they have their own particular circumstances,” said Yasmín Irizarry of the public defender’s office.

Acevedo, who became Charbonier’s assistant in 2013, is being held on \$10,000 bond.

The arrests come as Puerto Rico struggles through a 13-year economic and financial crisis that in part has been blamed on mismanagement and corruption.

Written by AP’s Danica Cotto