The Virgin Islands Consortium

New A.G. Staffing Up White Collar Crime Unit In D.O.J.

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Attorney General Denise George said Thursday that the Virgin Islands Department of Justice (VIDOJ) is reassembling its team of white-collar crime fighters to root out public corruption and financial crimes in the territory.

"White-collar and corruption crimes should never go unchecked," Ms. George said Thursday morning at a gathering of media, Gov. Albert Bryan and the territory's top law enforcement officials.

Ironically, the ink was hardly dry around the corner at the Ron DeLugo Federal Building on St. Thomas, where minutes earlier the latest local government official pleaded not guilty to a litany of federal fraud and corruption charges.

Former Casino Control Commission chairwoman Violet Anne Golden and her alleged cohort, Stephanie Barnes, were arraigned on charges involving the theft of hundreds of thousands of dollars in federal money.

The additional VIDOJ manpower will include attorneys, investigators, accountants and support staff needed to prosecute financially motivated, corrupt practices involving public officials, Ms. George said. The department is already discussing the budget impact, “It is so important,” Ms. George said, “ … to maintain the integrity and honesty in government so that the community can have respect and trust in its leaders.”

“We want to tell the people of the Virgin Islands we have zero tolerance for corruption,” Mr. Bryan said. “Corruption is a black eye for the entire community. It’s not just the politicians or the public worker ... its how people view us as Virgin Islanders."

The attorney general reviewed the broad outlines of the anti-corruption task force during a Thursday press conference at the Omar Brown Fire Station in Charlotte Amalie. She said agents skilled in conducting complex financial fraud and corruption investigations would be detailed from local agencies and brought in from outside the department.

On paper – and on its website – the VIDOJ already has a white collar crime section with a statutory mandate to investigate and prosecute public corruption. In reality, it’s not a thing.

“At some point in time in the past three years, the white collar, public corruption division has been totally dismantled,” said Ms. George. “It does not exist to any reasonable, functional level in the V.I. Department of Justice.”

In recent years, federal authorities have taken the lead on investigating and prosecuting corrupt local officials.