

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Two Men Sentenced for Possessing Over \$1 Million Cash Onboard a Vessel Outfitted for Smuggling

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ST. THOMAS — Abnel Colon and Jose Ernesto Vazquez Colon, both from Puerto Rico, were sentenced last Thursday for possession of more than \$1 million in cash onboard a vessel outfitted for smuggling, United States Attorney Gretchen C.F. Shappert announced.

District Court Judge Robert A. Molloy sentenced Abnel Colon to 37 months incarceration, a term of supervised release, and ordered him to pay a \$100 special assessment. Jose Ernesto Vazquez Colon was sentenced to 30 months of incarceration, a term of supervised release and ordered to pay a \$100 special assessment.

According to court documents, on or about September 20, 2019, Customs and Border Protection Marine Unit agents were conducting border security patrols near the west side of St. Thomas. At 10:50 p.m., the agents made radar contact with a vessel traveling eastward toward St. Thomas roughly 3 miles north of Savana Island, within the territorial waters of the United States. When agents intercepted the vessel, it was traveling without lights and failed to stop after agents activated their blue lights. Agents observed two individuals throwing large bags overboard into the water.

Agents fired flares in an attempt to have the vessel stop, but the vessel did not stop, and so agents disabled the vessel's motor. CBP agents then boarded the boat and found two individuals on board, Abnel Colon and Jose Ernesto Vazquez Colon. Both were identified as the individuals who were throwing the bags overboard, and Jose Ernesto Vazquez Colon was identified as the pilot. CBP agents later recovered the bags that had been thrown overboard, one of which had been weighted with a dumbbell, and the bags were found to contain over \$1,000,000 in United States currency. On board the vessel, which had been rented from a business in Fajardo, Puerto Rico, agents found 3-4 dumbbells with ropes attached, as well as a GPS device, which is generally used to pinpoint the location of jettisoned contraband so that it can be retrieved later.

This case was investigated by Homeland Security Investigations and Customs and Border