

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Captain of Vessel Pleads Guilty to Smuggling \$287,660 into St. Thomas Following High-Speed Chase and Apprehension Near Savana Island in St. Thomas

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ST. THOMAS — Arioc Diaz Melendez, resident of Puerto Rico, appeared before United States Magistrate Judge Ruth Miller in the District Court and entered a guilty plea to the charge of concealing \$287,660.00 in U.S. currency while onboard a vessel outfitted for smuggling in violation of Title 46, United States Code, Section 70503(a)(3).

According to court documents, on September 30, 2019, at approximately 2:00 A.M., Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Marine Unit agents identified a boat traveling without navigational lights north of Savana Island located off the west end of St. Thomas.

CBP agents pulled their vessel alongside the 24-foot yola-type vessel that was operating without lights. CBP agents activated their police blue lights and discharged a flare, in an effort to convince the other vessel to yield. When CBP agents attempted to initiate a stop, the other vessel did not yield but instead increased speed.

The CBP agents shot one round into one of the engines of the other vessel at which point the vessel decreased speed and stopped. The passenger threw a duffel bag overboard. The bag was recovered by CBP agents and later found to contain \$287,660.00 in U.S. currency and a Glock firearm. After CBP agents disabled one of the boat's motor, they boarded the vessel, and apprehended the captain, who was later identified as Arioc Diaz Melendez, and the passenger, later identified as Jose Carlos Diaz Melendez, of the vessel.

The passenger is expected to plead guilty at a future date.

This case was investigated by the Department of Homeland Security Investigations and Customs and Border Protection. It is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Juan Albino.