

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Passenger of Vessel Pleads Guilty to Smuggling \$287,660 into St. Thomas Following High-Speed Chase and Apprehension

Crime / **Published On December 10, 2020 05:58 PM /**

Staff Consortium **December 10, 2020**



ST. THOMAS — Jose Carlos 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 while onboard a vessel outfitted for smuggling in violation of Title 46, United States Code, Section 70503(a)(3), U.S. Attorney Gretchen C.F. Shappert announced. [Late last month](#) Arioc Diaz Melendez, a resident of Puerto Rico, pleaded guilty to the charge of concealing \$287,660.00 in U.S. currency while onboard a vessel outfitted for smuggling.

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. After pleading guilty, Jose Carlos Diaz Melendez was remanded to the custody of the Bureau of Prisons. He will be sentenced on a later date. The captain of the vessel, Arioc Diaz Melendez, pled guilty on November 30, 2020 and is awaiting sentencing.

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