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Virgin Islanders Go Without Pay as Attorney General Places Lien on Account of Epstein Estate Used to Make Payroll, Maintain Islands

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Little St. James By. REUTERS/MARCO BELLO

Fifteen Virgin Islanders working on the Epstein Estate off the east coast of St. Thomas, the two islands owned by the now-dead billionaire Jeffery Epstein, went without pay on March 5 and would have been without salary payment again on Friday if the Dept. of Justice did not partially remove a freeze on the Epstein Estate account used to pay employees maintaining the island.

The work on the islands includes landscaping, maintenance of vehicles and other property, security, repairmen, among others. Two people with knowledge of the matter told the Consortium Wednesday afternoon that the government had placed a lien on the account which prevented the

Estate from making payments for utilities, including a V.I. Water and Power bill totaling \$134,815. The people requested anonymity to speak freely on the matter.

"The Estate didn't realize that this particular account had a lien on it, so there were several checks that they had written, including WAPA, and the checks bounced and that's how they found out the account had a lien on it," said one of the people.

After learning of the lien, the Estate on February 26 wrote to the Attorney General's Office and Governor Albert Bryan, requesting that the account be partially unfrozen to facilitate payment of these employees and other maintenance needs.

"Only enough to make payroll and to pay the expenses to maintain the island," one of the people said regarding the request made to the A.G.'s office and Mr. Bryan.

The letter, written on Feb. 26, says the Estate learned that the government issued a lien on the account that is used to pay employees and maintain both islands. "As a result of the lien, checks that were outstanding are bouncing, causing unnecessary fees to be incurred," it reads, according to one of the people. "In addition there are rent and payroll obligations due next week. We request that the government immediately release the lien... to allow payment of these imminent expenses and to cover payments that had been made but had not yet cleared at the time the lien was issued."

In responses to questions posed by the Consortium Wednesday to the Office of the Attorney General, A.G. Denise George said the liens were placed on the Epstein Estate accounts after the V.I. D.O.J. filed a Criminally Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (CICO) action against the Estate.

"The important purpose of these liens is to ensure that the Estate does not improperly dispose of or dissipate assets that are required to satisfy the Government's claims on behalf of the people of the Virgin Islands or the claims of Epstein's victims," said Ms. George. "While the Estate has challenged these liens in the Probate and Superior Courts, they remain in force."

She added, "Throughout the litigation, the Government has acted promptly to release funds as needed for the victim compensation fund and to satisfy other Estate expenses, including salaries."

In explaining the timeline, Ms. George said, "The lien was not placed on this account until February 26th. Prior to that date, there was no impediment to the Estate's payment of any expenses related to Little St. James, its staff, or WAPA bills. The Estate requested a release of funds from the new lien to cover upcoming payroll for March to May, as well as the 8 boats and 13 utility vehicles that the Estate continues to maintain. Any questions as to why the Estate did not pay expenses owed prior to February 26th, including past-due WAPA bills dating back to December, would have to be directed to the Estate."

The Consortium sought responses from Governor Albert Bryan Wednesday afternoon and just after 6:00 p.m. Wednesday from the Attorney General's Office. Mr. Bryan did not respond, however the response from the A.G.'s office came at 7:48 p.m., in which she stated that the funds requested were released. "In any event at 4:42 p.m. today, the Government released the funds requested by the Estate and notified the Estate that funds were available," Ms. George said.

She added, "As it has done consistently, the Government will continue to monitor the Estate's expenses and ensure that funds are available to maintain the Estate and pay its necessary expenses, including its staff."

"Because this matter is in litigation, the Government cannot provide additional details regarding the Estate's funds or the activities of the Co-Executors, beyond those laid out in its recently filed amended complaint."

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