

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Puerto Rican Man Pleads Guilty After Being Caught on Vessel Attempting to Smuggle \$3.7 Million Into St. Thomas

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U.S. Attorney Gretchen C.F. Shappert announced Wednesday that Jerry Kirkland-Marrero, 30, from Puerto Rico, pleaded guilty today to conspiracy to conceal more than \$100,000 on board a vessel outfitted for smuggling.

According to court documents, U.S. Customs and Border Protection Air and Marine Operations (CBP AMO) was patrolling the waters near Brewers Bay, St. Thomas on April 21, 2020 when at about 8:40 p.m., interdiction agents spotted a vessel entering the area without its lights illuminated.

As CBO AMO initiated a stop of the vessel, agents observed occupants of the vessel throwing duffle bags overboard. Once on board, the agents identified the vessel's three occupants, including Kirkland-Marrero.

The agents recovered three duffle bags from the water, as well as a fourth bag that one of the occupants had been in the process of trying to throw overboard when the agents boarded the vessel. Each of the duffle bags contained vacuum sealed bundles of U.S. currency, with a combined total value of approximately \$3,765,740 in U.S. currency.

A GPS tracker was also recovered from one of the duffel bags. The vessel, which was operating after sunset without its lights, was outfitted for smuggling, as the 22-foot boat had five auxiliary gas tanks; its hull identification number plate had been removed; and it bore the same Puerto Rican registration number as another boat of a similar size.

Kirkland-Marrero faces a maximum term of fifteen years in prison. A federal district court judge will determine the sentence after considering the U.S. sentencing guidelines and other statutory factors.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Homeland Security Investigations, and U.S. Customs and Border Protection Air and Marine Operations are investigating the case.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Meredith J. Edwards is prosecuting the case, which is part of an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF) operation. OCDETF identifies, disrupts, and dismantles the highest-level criminal organizations that threaten the United States using a prosecutor-led, intelligence-driven, multi-agency approach. Additional information about the OCDETF Program can be found at <https://www.justice.gov/OCDETF>.