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Female and Male on St. Thomas Stab Each Other in Domestic Dispute; Two Cellphones and \$8,000 Cash Recovered from Female; Minor's Statement to Police Holds Little Weight to Judge

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Mugshots of Tonia Mella and Shawn Callwood. By. THE VIRGIN ISLANDS POLICE DEPARTMENT

ST. THOMAS — A woman and man on St. Thomas allegedly stabbed one another in a domestic violence dispute on Tuesday. The male suspect was said to come to the residence asking for his items—two cellphones and \$8,000 cash—that were in the possession of the female suspect. A minor present at the residence gave detailed statements to police that held little weight to the presiding judge in court.

Both Tonia T. Mella and Shawn Callwood appeared before the Magistrate Judge Henry V. Carr III from the Bureau of Corrections on Wednesday for their advisement hearing.

Both Mella and Callwood are defendants in their own case against each other surrounding a domestic violence assault. Mella was charged with third-degree assault as an act of domestic violence (DV) and grand larceny, while Callwood was charged with third-degree assault / DV, disturbance of the peace (threats), and unlawful entry.

The defense, represented by Attorney Frederick Johnson, argued that there is no probable cause for the third-degree assault charge against Mella and that it should be dismissed without prejudice or reduced, alluding that Mella stabbing Callwood upon entering the residence she was in may amount to self-defense. Attn. Johnson wanted to “nip this in the bud right now,” he said. He suspected that Mella’s third-degree assault charge will be dropped or that a plea for a lesser charge will be proposed in future proceedings.

The prosecuting attorney John Barraco argued that the third-degree assault charge should remain as Attn. Johnson’s argument is not a challenge to probable cause for the offense, but a defense itself. He added, “It’s the people’s position that we would like to develop discovery a little bit more before dropping the charge. I understand where defense council is coming from, but we only have Ms. Mella’s side of that statement, so we’d like to get all of the facts before we dismiss that.”

Based on the probable cause fact sheet, Mella said that she opened the door for Callwood. Contradictory to Mella’s statement, a minor female who was present said that Mella told Callwood, “If you enter the residence, I am going to stab you!” The minor continued to explain that Callwood then entered the home by pushing out the cardboard from a missing glass in the door that he broke on a prior occasion. Neither Mella nor Callwood’s statements corroborated that of the minor. In fact, Callwood’s statement to police does not say how he entered the home at all, according to the fact sheet.

Since Mella’s statement in the fact sheet said that she opened the door, Judge Carr suggested, “If you’re going to reduce it for one or dismiss it for one, it should be done for the other.” Mella opening the door begs the question as to whether Callwood unlawfully entered the home thus causing her to pull a knife as self-defense to prevent him from entering the premises. Judge Carr considered the unlawful entry charge to be weak as it takes the side of the minor, contradicting that Mella said she opened the door.

To the prosecution, Judge Carr urged Barraco to make a swift position on the matter. Barraco decided that third-degree assault should stand for both parties, and Judge Carr found that there was sufficient probable cause for that charge against both defendants.

Additional details of the case in the probable cause fact sheet as reported to police by the minor are that Callwood took the knife from Mella, stabbed her twice, pulled her hair, and threw her over a four-foot porch. Mella then ran to a neighbor who defended Mella with a firearm against Callwood. According to Mella’s statement, Callwood came to the residence to retrieve his items. She first told him that she didn’t know what he was talking about. Then, she told him to go to the police station for his things. At some point, Mella picked up a pocketknife to defend herself, she said. It was used to slice him and not cut him deeply, according to Mella’s statement. Callwood said he didn’t realize he was stabbed until he was departing the residence and felt his back burning where he was stabbed. Mella stated that Callwood disarmed her and stabbed her on the hand with the knife.

When police searched the residence that Mella was in, police retrieved the two cellphones and cash.

The prosecuting attorney Barraco argued that each defendant should have different conditions, since the minor stated that Callwood threw Mella over a balcony and she had to flee to a neighbor's residence. The minor also stated that the only thing stopping Callwood was the neighbor chasing him away with a firearm. Additionally, the minor said that Callwood had stated hours earlier that he was going to kill Mella.

Judge Carr asked Attn. Barraco, "So you want the court to put 100 percent credence, reliability, credibility in [her own] daughter?" Therefore, the judge treated them both the same in his ruling.

Judge Carr made the following ruling for both Mella and Callwood:

- Post an unsecured appearance bond of \$1,000
- No contact with each other
- Maintain a distance of not less than 50 feet at all times
- Surrender passport and driver's license (not suspending driving privileges)