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Homeless Men, One With 38 Prior Arrests, Face Justice System Yet Again

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From left to right: Mugshots of Craig Stevens and Vaughn McHargue. By. THE VIRGIN ISLANDS POLICE DEPARTMENT

ST. THOMAS — Two homeless men have been granted bail after a string of burglaries in which they appeared to employ the same techniques.

On Wednesday, Craig Stevens appeared for a virtual hearing before Judge Carolyn Hermon-Purcell where he was advised of his rights in relation to two similar matters. Stevens faces a maximum of five years imprisonment for third-degree burglary as well as a maximum of one year imprisonment, a fine of not more than \$200, or both, for destruction of property. He is also charged with petty larceny which carries a maximum fine of \$200, up to one year in prison and

restitution.

These charges stem from his arrest on September 20, when an officer on patrol noticed a ladder leaning against a building which had an open shutter window that appeared to have been broken off its hinges. After stopping to investigate, the officer observed a man climbing out of the bottom floor window with a head-mounted flashlight and a shirt wrapped around his face. The officer approached the individual and arrested him without incident. He was subsequently identified as Craig Stevens, also known as "Runner". Police say he is known to law enforcement based on prior surveillance video and previous instances of breaking into multiple businesses. Processing of the crime scene in question revealed a crowbar as well as several locks to various doors and shutters around the business which appeared to have been removed with a bolt cutter.

With regards to the second matter, Stevens faces the same three charges but each are categorized as aiding and abetting. The charges carry the same penalties as detailed in relation to the first matter. In this instance, which took place one day before the burglary detailed above, officers obtained surveillance video showing evidence of two black males burglarizing an establishment at around 3:30 am. The footage shows the men removing various tools from a backpack including a hammer and a crowbar and later leaving the scene with a jar filled with cash and a bag filled with unidentified items. According to the probable cause fact sheet, the owner of the establishment was unsure of how much cash was taken, or the monetary value of the other items.

Based on the surveillance footage, one of the men did not conceal his identity with any face covering and police were able to identify him based on previous cases. The second suspect who was masked was later identified as Craig Stevens. This identification was made by an officer who had interacted with Stevens about an hour before the incident and recalled that he was wearing the same clothing as seen in the surveillance footage.

At Wednesday's advisement hearings, Attorney Brenda Scales noted that Stevens, age 52 had a criminal history spanning from 1986 to 2017 which included various arrests and convictions. Scales noted that Stevens, who has no fixed address or occupation, presents a danger to the community and that bail should therefore remain at \$25,000. However, noting that Stevens is homeless and indigent, Public Defender Alexia Furlow contended that bail should be lowered to \$10,000 with allowance for the posting of 10 percent.

Judge Carolyn Hermon- Purcell noted with concern that the court would not be able to keep track of Stevens without any telephone number, address or place of employment. As such, the Judge concluded that bail would remain at \$25,000 and that the defendant would be allowed release on the posting of 10 percent thereof. However, the Judge noted that she would be willing to modify the monetary bail if the accused could identify a suitable custodian with whom he could reside while abiding by a 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. daily curfew. While the two matters were dealt with separately, the same arguments applied and the same bail conditions were established.

Meanwhile, Stevens has also been identified as an accomplice in yet another burglary which took place on June 10th, 2021. He was identified by Vaughn McHargue, who also appeared for a virtual advisement hearing on Wednesday. This third incident was also captured on surveillance footage which showed two men, one of which was identified as Vaughn McHargue after he briefly lowered his face covering during the commission of the crime. While McHargue was already known to law enforcement, at the time, police were unable to identify the second suspect as his face covering remained on. The total value of items stolen in that burglary was estimated at well over \$4,000.

According to the probable cause fact sheet, officers met McHargue on September 21 while he was in police custody in relation to a separate matter. He subsequently confessed to the June burglary and identified the second suspect as Craig Stevense. McHargue, who is also homeless, faces aiding and abetting charges for the same three offenses: third-degree burglary, petty larceny and destruction of property. Attorney Brenda Scales noted that the Indiana native is a habitual offender with an extensive criminal history from 1998 to 2021. This includes at least 38 arrests and various convictions. He was granted bail in the sum of \$25,000 with allowance for the posting of 10 percent thereof, on condition that he identifies a suitable custodian.