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Puerto Rico Man Traveling to St. Thomas on Boat With \$316,930 in Cooler Facing 5-Year Sentence

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ST. THOMAS — A man from Puerto Rico traveling alone on a vessel to St. Thomas with more \$300,000 has been arrested by Homeland Security Investigation agents and is facing 5 years in prison after allegedly lying about the amount of money he was traveling with.

According to U.S. Attorney Gretchen C.F. Shappert of the District of the Virgin Islands, Blas Sebastian Panzardi Davila, age 38, pleaded guilty in federal court Friday to making a false statement to an agent of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), an executive agency of the United States.

According to court documents, Davila was the sole individual operating a vessel traveling from Puerto Rico to St. Thomas. Onboard the defendant's vessel was a cooler containing \$316,930 in

United States currency. U.S. Customs and Border Protection Marine Interdiction (CBP-MI) officers questioned Davila regarding the contents of the cooler, and he responded that he did not know what the cooler contained. CBP-MI officers opened the cooler and discovered the currency, and Davila then denied ownership.

HSI agents arrived and questioned Davila regarding ownership of the currency. He then claimed the currency belonged to him. Asked how he earned the money, Davila said he earned it while giving tourists diving tours in Puerto Rico. Asked how much currency was in the cooler, Davila said that it was approximately \$100,000. According to court documents, Davila made his false statements to agents of HSI, an agency of the executive branch of the government of the United States.

The \$316,930 in U.S. currency and the vessel operated by Davila were administratively forfeited by HSI.

Davila is scheduled to be sentenced on January 27, 2022 and faces a maximum penalty of 5 years in prison.

This case was investigated by Customs Border Protection and Homeland Security Investigations. It is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Everard E. Potter.

This prosecution is part of an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF) investigation. OCDETF identifies, disrupts, and dismantles the highest-level drug traffickers, money launderers, gangs, and transnational criminal organizations that threaten the United States by using a prosecutor-led, intelligence-driven, multi-agency approach that leverages the strengths of federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies against criminal networks.