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Senate Committee on Ethical Conduct Reduces Blyden's Punishment for Flouting Covid-19 Protocols

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Senator Marvin Blyden By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

Senators who make up the Senate Committee on Ethical Conduct today plan to introduce a reduced set of sanctions than what they had previously agreed upon as the fitting punishment for Senator Marvin Blyden's flouting of the V.I. Dept. of Health's Covid-19 protocols. Mr. Blyden in September attended an event two days after testing positive for Covid-19, and after being advised by the V.I. Dept. of Health to quarantine.

A V.I. Dept. of Justice-led case against the senator has been set for April after [a judge found probable cause](#) to charge Mr. Blyden with exposure in public place while infected with a contagious disease.

According to people with intimate knowledge of the original sanctions that the committee had already presented to key lawmakers, the committee had voted to suspend Mr. Blyden from the Senate for four months and strip him of his Senate majority leader position.

But the committee is prepared to present the full Senate with a resolution that includes a reduced suspension, though Mr. Blyden is still expected to be stripped of the majority leader position.

The resolution will be presented to the full Senate during today's session where they will also vote on the matter.

Senator Milton Potter, chairman of the five-member Committee on Ethical Conduct, acknowledged Wednesday that changes were made without providing details on the final sanctions. He said "the process was still very much in flux, and until the final resolution was officially presented to the full body, we still had an opportunity to look at it, deliberate, make changes if necessary, so we considered the process to still be in flux."

Members of the CEC include Mr. Potter, and Senators Kenneth Gittens, Kurt Vialet, Carla Joseph, and Dwayne M. DeGraff.

Mr. Potter described being the chair of the committee as a "no-win" situation, stating that whatever decision the CEC came up with, some people would be unsatisfied. "I don't think there's a possible sanction that's going to be 100 percent embraced by this community. I don't think the position that I am in as the chair of this committee... it's like a no-win situation. But I think that throughout the process the objective of the committee, if I can speak for them, was to really give Senator Blyden the appropriate due process to have a fair hearing."

The freshman senator said the full Senate will have an opportunity to vote on the resolution today where all lawmakers will decide for or against the recommended sanctions and can make changes if they so choose.

"The way that I'm looking at it is that the process was still in flux," he stressed. "The committee still had a right up to the day the resolution was presented, we had an opportunity to still look at it to deliberate. Ultimately the full body has an opportunity to look at it, make adjustments to it, say yes, say no. It was the Committee on Ethical Conduct's duty to investigate the matter and provide a recommended sanction for the body to follow or not."

The Consortium [reported exclusively on Monday, Sept. 20 that Mr. Blyden had flouted Dept. of Health Covid-19 protocols](#) when he went to an event with scores of people in attendance two days after testing positive for Covid-19. Mr. Blyden said he was first tested at the Legislature on Tues., Sept. 14 and refused to believe he was positive, so he sought another test at the V.I. Dept. of Health, which also returned positive Wednesday, Sept. 15. The senator said he was advised by D.O.H. to quarantine for 10 days. However, instead of following the health department's protocols, Mr. Blyden said he tested at home several times after and those tests came back negative. That prompted the senator to attend a function at Tillet Gardens using a government-owned, Legislature-issued, LEG 5 vehicle on the night of Saturday, Sept. 18.

The senator has since [acknowledged in part his wrongdoing](#) and profusely apologized to the public when the matter became public. Mr. Blyden said he had a "terrible lapse of judgement for failing to set an example as a community leader" when he attended the function at Tillet Gardens after testing positive for Covid-19.

But in the same release, Mr. Blyden sought to remove himself from possible punishment under V.I. law, contending that he would never knowingly expose others to Covid-19.

