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Dominican Republic Man Living in St. Thomas Facing Decades in Jail After Being Found With Illegal Firearm

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Mugshot of Francisco Espinosa Berdia. By. THE VIRGIN ISLANDS POLICE DEPARTMENT

ST. THOMAS - Police have charged a man with multiple firearm related violations after he was discovered with an illegal weapon.

Francisco Espinosa Berdia faces decades in prison after being charged with possession of an unlicensed firearm, possession of illegal ammunition, alteration of identifying marks of weapons and possession of a firearm within 1000 feet of a school.

According to the probable cause fact sheet, in the early hours of Christmas morning police were dispatched to General Gade in Savan following reports of shots being fired. While conducting an

inspection in the area, they discovered several spent casings and observed a vehicle driving towards them at high speed. The officers stopped the vehicle and the driver presented her documents upon request. According to the probable cause fact sheet, the front seat passenger later identified as Francisco Espinosa Berdia attempted to exit the vehicle and his shirt rose, revealing what appeared to be a firearm. Police quickly approached him, ordering him to exit the vehicle and place his hands on the car.

While officers patted him down they discovered a firearm which was removed from his person. An officer then asked Berdia whether he had a license for the firearm but he replied that he only spoke Spanish. A Spanish translator was then requested via telephone and Berdia was advised of his rights through the translator. However, he stated that he knew nothing about the firearm, claiming that it was not on him. An inspection of the weapon revealed that it was a black Glock 27 .40 cal pistol with obliterated serial numbers and a round in the chamber. He was subsequently arrested for unauthorized possession of a firearm and was turned over to the Bureau of Corrections after failing to pay bail which was set at \$50,000 by order of the court.

At a virtual bail hearing on Monday, attorney Alexia Furlow noted that the defendant has been residing in the USVI for 3 years, despite being born in the Dominican Republic. While Assistant V. I. Attorney General Brenda Scales asked that bail be set at \$25,000, Furlow requested that Berdia be released on the posting of 10 percent of the figure. Scales emphasized that the accused has no address and no passport, after Furlow revealed that his passport was lost.

Judge Paula Norkaitis eventually set bail at \$25,000 with no 10 percent provision, noting that Berdia posed a flight risk. As such, he has been ordered to submit his documentation from the Dominican Republic to the court.