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Steven Payne Given 20 Days to Respond to Ethics Committee Findings; Beleaguered Senator's Days in Senate May be Numbered

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Ernice Gilbert **June 17, 2022**

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Senator Steven Payne Sr. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

The Senate Committee on Ethical Conduct has delivered its findings to Senator Steven Payne regarding the sexual harassment complaint filed against him by a young, female employee of his office, two people with intimate knowledge of the matter have told the Consortium.

The committee has given Mr. Payne 20 days to respond to the findings, and a decision on his fate in the august body is expected sometime in July, the people said.

The senator has been absent from committee hearings after pressure mounted from within the Democratic Party and in the public following the publication of reports on the Consortium about three women who have accused Mr. Payne of either sexual assault or sexual harassment. The accusations [culminated with Steffi Emilien](#), who said Mr. Payne had stuck his tongue in her mouth while in a band room on St. John, forced her to take a shower with him in a hotel in Florida, and forced her to take off her pants and join him on a bed in a home in Florida belonging to his sister, while showing her a sex toy and describing its use to her — all while Emilien was a minor.

Regarding the incident in the band room, she said, "So when we went into the band room, he tell me to come. So when I came, he basically made me sit on him, almost like cuddling him, and then he was just talking to me and stuff. By the time I check, his tongue was all up in my mouth and stuff."

On the incident in the hotel room, Emilien stated, "He told me when his daughter used to come over to St. Thomas to visit him, she used to bathe with him. So he went on to basically push me to take a shower with him. I was terrified the whole time, my heart was just racing, and I was like Lord, I just hope this man doesn't force me to do anything else I do not want to do. I just hope this doesn't lead into penetration or anything like that."

About the matter involving the sex toy, she said, "So his sister has four rooms in the house. The guest room was all the way to the end of the upstairs hallway. We were supposed to go to the movies or something. I remember I was wearing a grey Nike jacket, I remember. Then he called me in the room, but I didn't think anything was going to happen there because this is your sister's house, you understand? The thing about all these events was, it's wasn't like back-to back, so it wasn't something that my mind was on. So when he called me to his room, I didn't think that something was going to happen. When I end up in the room, he basically told me take off my pants and get on the bed. So that was when my heart started to race because I was like what to do? His sister not there, even if I scream, nobody can hear me because of where the house is.

"So at that point I didn't even know what to do. Then the man took out one of those silver bullet vibrators, that have a remote - I don't know, but something like that - and he was just talking to me and then he told me "this is what you do". At that moment, I could have just died. I felt like just dying. If I could have a gun and just shoot myself in the head, it would be better than this. "

Emilien's [emotional account](#) led to calls for Mr. Payne to resign, including [a letter signed by his fourteen colleagues](#) in the Senate. Before the Legislature acted, however, the Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands [had already demanded Mr. Payne's resignation](#), and Governor Albert Bryan had [called on the V.I. Dept. of Justice](#) to launch an investigation.

Emilien's allegations were not the first. On April 11, the Consortium published a report on the allegations made against the senator by Chezni Jones. Ms. Jones [first posted the alleged encounter on Facebook in 2018](#), and it was then picked up by the Consortium following the complaint made against Mr. Payne by one of his young staffers.

The post described a day in 2005 when a much-younger Jones accompanied the senator to a beach in St. John. Mr. Payne was an officer of the V.I. Police Department at the time, and was helping Jones train as part of her efforts to join the police academy, Ms. Jones said. Payne was assigned to a local school and Jones was an employee at the learning institution. During a series of exclusive interviews with Consortium journalists, Ms. Jones recounted her memories of the alleged incident that she said transformed the now-senator in her eyes from trusted mentor to dangerous predator, saying, "He suggested that we go to the beach so that, you know, nobody won't say anything by seeing us practicing and stuff like that. He felt that we needed to be discreet."

Jones, who did not hide her identity when coming forward, says that once at the beach, Payne soon began to encourage her to grab his private area, and quickly became so aggressive that he ended up ripping her underwear.

The first complaint, made by the young, female employee in his office, [was brought to the fore](#) by the Consortium. The publication cited trusted sources with knowledge of the matter who told us that the female complainant was among other employees traveling from St. Thomas to St. Croix and staying at a hotel as part of their Senate duties with Mr. Payne's office. This employee allegedly realized that her luggage was missing and made inquiries with other employees of Mr. Payne's office. Still unable to find the luggage, she allegedly approached Mr. Payne outside his hotel room to ask whether he knew what happened to the luggage. Mr. Payne allegedly had the luggage, and it was then that he allegedly invited the employee to stay in his room, an alleged action the employee is said to have refused.

The Office of Senate President Donna Frett-Gregory subsequently issued a statement confirming that an investigation was launched into the allegations against Mr. Payne.

The senator issued two statements on May 27, one attempting to [dismiss the allegations](#) while another claimed that [people were being paid](#) to malign him. Then on Monday, a letter was received by the Senate from "Virgin Islands Concerned Citizens" that made [defaming claims](#) about all but one senator: Mr. Payne. The letter suggested that they all should resign too. Ms. Frett-Gregory said she would pursue a federal investigation into what she described as attempts of intimidation and threats.