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Over a Dozen Eavesdropping Devices Found in More Than Five Government Agencies, Police Commissioner Says; OMB IT Employees Placed on Administrative Leave

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Ernice Gilbert **August 05, 2022**

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The Office of Management and Budget Office in St. Thomas. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

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Local and federal law enforcement authorities are investigating the placement of hidden eavesdropping devices at various locations inside the Office of Management and Budget building in St. Thomas, the Consortium has learned.

According to people with intimate knowledge of the unfolding event, the V.I. Police Department and federal agents entered the OMB office, located in the area of Post Office Square in St. Thomas, on Friday morning and were examining the entire office as of Friday afternoon. Police Commissioner Ray Martinez has since corroborated the information during an interview with the Consortium.

As a result of the probe, three employees at OMB employed in the department's Information Technology (IT) office were placed on administrative leave, Police Commissioner Ray Martinez said. He said those employees were placed on leave with pay at the V.I.P.D.'s request so law enforcement could have full access to the systems at OMB while the investigation is ongoing.

"For the access that we need, we need 100 percent unadulterated access to the system. We're not saying that they did anything, but we don't need anybody with administrator access going into the system for the next couple of days until we do what we have to do," the commissioner said.

To date over a dozen devices were found in more than five agencies. The commissioner could not say whether the eavesdropping was politically motivated. "Sometime down the line as the investigation progresses, I will divulge what government agencies they were found in, but for now in order to protect the investigation, I cannot divulge that," he said.

Mr. Martinez condemned the alleged act and said law enforcement would utilize all their resources to bring the perpetrators to justice. "The individuals who placed these devices for nefarious reasons underestimated local law enforcement's ability to discover them," he said. "We will not idly stand by and allow these individuals to trample our civil rights and intentionally interfere with the effective and orderly operation of our government. They underestimated our dedication and access to advanced digital forensic capabilities. Make no mistake we have only just scratched the surface of this investigation."

OMB Director Jenifer O'Neal informed the V.I. Police Department of the suspicious devices and informed the V.I.P.D. The police department in turn requested support from federal partners, and FBI agents who specialize in digital forensics flew from Puerto Rico to aid in the operation, said the people. The V.I. Dept. of Justice is also involved in the investigation.