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Woman Arrested After Using Counterfeit V.I. Housing Authority Check to Purchase \$939 Worth of Goods at The Market St. Croix

Crime / **Published On October 06, 2022 06:59 AM /**

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Mugshot of Noemi Martinez. By. THE VIRGIN ISLANDS POLICE DEPARTMENT

ST. CROIX — A woman appeared before a judge in the V.I. Superior court on Wednesday on multiple charges including forgery and grand larceny.

Noemi Martinez, age 25, was arrested on charges of obtaining money by false pretense, forgery, passing forged bills or notes, grand larceny and identity theft.

Her arrest follows a report on April 19, 2018, made to the Economic Crime Unit of the V.I. Police Department by the security management at The Market St. Croix (formerly Plaza Extra West), of

a possible counterfeit scheme involving the V.I. Housing Authority.

According to the documents before the courts, on April 19, 2018, the ECU initiated an investigation into a complaint by The Market St. Croix, and was asked to make contact with the chief financial officer of the V.I. Department of Finance with regard to possible counterfeit checks. The CFO advised the ECU that the checks in question were not printed through their system and that DOF would not be making a report because it did not suffer any loss. The CFO stated that the Dept. of Finance had new checks and a new verification system, and therefore the checks were stopped by Banco Popular.

The Market St. Croix provided the ECU with the three checks, receipts for the purchases and surveillance footage with the individuals cashing those checks. The supermarket said the checks were written using the V.I. Housing Authority bank account information and were returned due to not being authorized. The Market St. Croix was advised to contact a representative of the V.I. Housing Authority. When contacted, VIHA said the checks were not issued by the authority and that Banco Popular created a new verification system to block unauthorized checks.

One of the checks was paid to the order of Noemi Martinez, dated March 29, 2018, in the amount of \$939.32. The receipt for the purchase was dated April 4, 2018, with a total purchase of \$95.76. The surveillance footage revealed that a black female with blond hair wearing a black vest, short white pants and black slippers had cashed that check.

On May 7, 2018, a subpoena was served to Banco Popular for copies of the front and back of the checks written with the V.I. Housing Authority account. On May 14, 2018, the requested documents provided by the bank revealed that the check cashed by a Noemi Martinez revealed her address and that she had used her voter's identification card. A review of Martinez's voter identification card at the V.I. Board of Elections displayed the same number as what was on the back of the check in question.

On May 23, 2018, contact was made with Martinez regarding the incident. She was advised that the ECU was conducting an investigation in which her name was mentioned, and officers asked whether she was willing to answer any questions. Martinez agreed and provided the officers with a video statement.

Martinez provided police with her voter identification card and said that she was unemployed and did not have a bank account. She stated that the last check she cashed was a Social Security check with her mother's assistance. Martinez further stated that she was never employed with the V.I. Housing Authority. She was shown the check dated March 29, 2018 and confirmed that she used her V.I voter's identification card to cash it at The Market St. Croix, at the time Plaza Extra West. She said she did not prepare the check, but she received it in her mailbox. Martinez also said she cashed the check because she needed to help her family. She said that no one contacted her to cash the check and she did not give anyone half of the funds.

The investigation revealed that the check dated March 29, 2018 was counterfeited using the V.I. Housing Authority account information without the authority's permission, and it was cashed by Martinez.

In court on Wednesday, a judge ruled that Martinez would be allowed to post an unsecured bond for the \$20,000 bail amount to secure her release. Upon posting, she would be released into the third-party custody of a relative. Martinez was ordered to surrender her passport and will not be permitted to leave St. Croix without the court's written authorization.

She is to report to the Office of Probation once a week and is to have no contact with the victim or any witnesses in the matter.

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