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Man Allegedly Commits Forgery Against Former Employer After Stealing, Cashing Checks Worth \$1,000

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Mugshot of Ariel Petersen. By. THE VIRGIN ISLANDS POLICE DEPARTMENT

ST. CROIX — A man appeared before a V.I. Superior Court judge Wednesday to face grand larceny and other charges.

Ariel Peterson was recently arrested and charged with obtaining money by false pretense, forgery and grand larceny following a report of forgery by the owner of Armstrong Ice Cream.

According to the documents before the courts, the V.I. Police Department's Economic Crime Unit initiated an investigation after being contacted by the establishment owner. He said that on May 1, while conducting some online banking transactions, he saw some suspicious activity on his FirstBank checking account. He discovered that two of his personal checks — one written to Ariel

Peterson on April 10 for \$500, and one written to another individual in the same amount — were written and cashed without his authorization.

The complainant said that he did not write or sign the checks, although it was written on his account. He also said that he kept his FirstBank checkbook in the center console of his pick-up truck which Peterson would clean once a week, however when he looked for it after detecting the suspicious activity, the check book was no longer there.

The complainant said that over the past four to five years, Peterson would come to the establishment to do odd jobs but he always paid him in cash. He gave a description of Peterson to police and presented officers with a copy of the checks including the one signed by Peterson on the back, which also had a Social Security number. He said the only person who could have taken the checkbook out of the truck was Peterson, and that he did not give anyone permission to write or sign his signature on any of his FirstBank personal checks.

On June 23, police traveled to Banco Popular in reference to a subpoena served, as the check written out to Peterson was deposited in Popular on April 27. Contact was made with Peterson on July 13 and he agreed to give police an interview.

Peterson stated that he worked for the complainant for three years where he washed the vehicles and cleaned the grills. He admitted that the owner paid him in cash whenever he worked and there was never an instance where he paid him by check. Peterson was shown a copy of the check and was asked if he had cashed it. He said that he had never seen the check and that while the signature behind the check looked like his, he did not sign it. The last four digits of the Social Security number at the back of the check matched that of Peterson's.

Investigations revealed that the checks were cashed at Moe's Gas Station sometime in July.

Investigations also revealed that while washing the owner of Armstrong Ice Cream's truck, Peterson took the checkbook out of the console and wrote two checks for \$500 each, without the complainant's permission, causing Moe's Gas Station to suffer a loss of \$1,000.

In court on Wednesday, a judge ruled that Peterson would be allowed to post \$250 cash with the remainder of the \$20,000 bail to be posted as an unsecured bond. He is barred from leaving St. Croix without the court's written permission and must surrender his passport if he has one. Peterson must report to the Office of Probation every Tuesday and is to have no contact, directly or indirectly with the victim or any witnesses in the matter.