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One Senator Wants Territory to Elect Attorneys General Following Governor Bryan's Firing of Previous Office Holder

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As the Office of the Attorney General reported already receiving half of a \$105 million cash settlement from the Jeffery Epstein estate, one Senator suggested removing the governor's control over the territory's chief legal officer.

Acting Attorney General Carol Thomas-Jacobs testified before the Committee on Homeland Security, Justice and Public Safety on Tuesday about the recent accomplishments of the AG's office. One of those accomplishments was the Epstein estate's settlement, announced last year.

"We have received just a little over half of that to date. We expect to receive the balance within a year," Ms. Thomas-Jacobs shared.

Following Ms. Thomas-Jacobs' recitations, Senator Alma Francis Heyliger remarked that she was "impressed" by the newly appointed AG's testimony, but quickly realized that the testimony was the result of the work put in by former Attorney General Denise N. George, who was dismissed by Governor Albert Bryan Jr. on [New Year's Eve](#).

"I enjoyed all of the things that you were talking about and then it dawned on me, a lot of these things happened under the old AG and I thought to myself, 'I still don't know why that woman was fired'," Ms. Francis Heyliger stated. "That's a major concern for me...this is why I made sure I put in legislation to petition Congress to have that position set up as an elected one," the Senator added. If adopted, the legislation would bring the territory in line with 43 of the 50 U.S. states who also elect their attorneys general.

According to the National Association of Attorneys General, [some of the roles](#) of the AG include "instituting civil suits on behalf of the state", and "operating victim compensation programs".

According to Governor Bryan, a trend of poor communication between himself and Ms. George, who he [appointed in 2019](#) to a 6-year term, culminated in him being blindsided by a civil suit filed against JP Morgan Chase, claiming that the bank was culpable in facilitating transactions connected to Epstein's sex trafficking enterprise.

In the lawsuit, Ms. George [accused the bank](#) of turning a blind eye to Epstein's criminal activities on Little St. James, one of two islands he owned in the territory. JP Morgan shot back in a motion to dismiss, accusing the USVI of hypocrisy. The [bank's attorneys argued](#) that the territory was privy to the same information the former AG said the bank should have known about its former client, and yet still granted massive tax benefits to Epstein-owned businesses.

Governor Bryan, who said in an [exclusive interview](#) with the Consortium in January that he was "really sick and tired of our islands being associated with Jeffrey Epstein," said he learned "in the papers" about the lawsuit against JP Morgan, "an institution that we're trying to, at the same time, establish relations with."

Mr. Epstein died in jail in 2019 of a reported suicide while awaiting trial on sex trafficking charges. He was accused by Ms. George of sexually abusing girls as young as 12 years old on Little St. James.

As part of the V.I. D.O.J.'s efforts led by the former attorney general, dozens of women who were victims of Mr. Epstein's sexual abuse as teenagers or young adults will be compensated using monies from the sale of his private residence, Little St. James Island in the USVI. He also owned the sister island Great St. James.

Committee Chair Senator Kenneth Gittens offered one critique of Ms. George's negotiated settlement — he believes that title to the island should have reverted back to the Virgin Islands.

"Rather than settling for money, that land should have belonged to the people and not have an opportunity for somebody else like that to come and purchase that place. I really wish that we could relook that and see where we go from there," he remarked.

According to the acting attorney general, the USVI's half of the sale price of St. James will be placed in a trust fund to help sexual crime victims.