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Traffic Stop Triggered by Lack of Seat Belt Leads to Cocaine-Possession Arrest of Two Men

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From left to right, mugshots of Calis Sewer and Javier Francisco Pimentel Feliciano. By. THE VIRGIN ISLANDS POLICE DEPARTMENT

ST. THOMAS — Two men were arrested in St. Thomas on drug charges after being stopped by police for a seat belt citation.

While enforcing traffic checks near the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services building around 5:20 pm on Tuesday, officers of the Special Investigations Bureau saw a white Suzuki SUV traveling northwards. They noticed that the front passenger was not wearing his seat belt and that something was hanging from the mirror which could possibly obstruct the driver's view. Officers turned on their blue lights indicating that they were conducting a traffic stop, and the

driver who was later identified as 24-year-old Calis Sewer, pulled over safely off the road.

The officers told Sewer that he was being stopped because his passenger was not wearing a seat belt and informed him of the possible obstruction of his rear view mirror, according to documents shared in court Wednesday.

When asked for his driving documents, Sewer handed police his insurance paperwork but said that he did not have his driver's license with him. He was told that it was illegal to operate a vehicle in the territory without a driver's license immediately available, and was issued a citation for not having it. After being told that they were going to reach out to Central Dispatch to verify whether Sewer indeed was in possession of a driver's license, he offered to show the officer a copy of it on his phone. The officer asked him to step out of the vehicle as he reached for his phone on his seat.

Once outside of the vehicle, Sewer showed the officer the document. While writing up the citation, the officer overheard his partner asking the other passenger in the vehicle why he was so nervous, as he was fidgety, moving around in the vehicle. After realizing that the man spoke English, police asked him to step out of the vehicle as well. At that point, documents presented in court allege that Sewer became difficult — his hands and legs were shaking as he fumbled with his phone.

Sewer and his passenger, 56-year-old Javier Francisco Pimentel Feliciano, became even more agitated when officers informed them that they were bringing a K-9 officer to inspect the vehicle.

A dog specializing in the detection of narcotics was brought to the scene and alerted towards the rear of the vehicle, giving officers the green light to search the vehicle in its entirety. That's when Sewer reportedly became enraged and started flailing his arms, attempting to push away another officer who was on the scene. Sewer was asked to stop and to place his hands behind his back. Officers continued with their search of the vehicle and opened the back hatch, upon which the drug-sniffing dog went straight for a black duffel bag that was in the trunk. After the bag was placed on the ground, the dog alerted to it, indicating the strong possibility of narcotics inside.

Sewer did not respond when the officers asked if the duffel bag belonged to him. After opening the bag, officers found brick-like packages inside it, which turned out to be 18 parcels of cocaine, totaling 19.75 kilograms.

Sewer of St. Thomas and Feliciano of St. John were both arrested and charged with constructive possession of an illegal narcotic with intent to distribute and trafficking a controlled substance.

During their advice of rights hearing on Wednesday March 22, the presiding magistrate granted both Sewer and Feliciano conditional release ahead of trial, the stipulations of which had not been uploaded to the court's online portal at time of publication.