

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Man Accused of Strangling Girlfriend's Son For Laughing Charged With Child Abuse, Assault

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Mugshot of Vincente Pesante Jr. By. THE VIRGIN ISLANDS POLICE DEPARTMENT

ST. CROIX — A man who allegedly strangled his girlfriend's son because he thought the child was laughing at him is now before the courts on charges of assault and child abuse.

Last Thursday, June 1, the child's father summoned police and V.I. Department of Human Services officials to his home, where they met the 13-year-old boy. He had scratch marks on both sides of his neck, a scratch on his right elbow at least 3 inches long, as well as bruising on that same elbow.

According to court documents, the child told police that a few days earlier he was at his mother's home when Vincente Pesante Jr., her boyfriend, came over and began to argue with the woman. The boy says he went outside on the porch to spit, looked back inside, and noticed the adults still arguing. Pesante apparently thought that the boy was laughing at him, and so reportedly came outside onto the porch and pushed the boy down to the ground before putting both hands around his neck and squeezing, allegedly strangling the minor to the extent that the child could no longer breathe.

"You like taking things like a joke," Pesante is alleged to have told the boy while assaulting him. His mother eventually freed the boy from her boyfriend's clutches, after which she, the boy, and a witness to the attack were picked up by Pesante's sister and driven away from the house. The boy told police that his mother's boyfriend threatened them with a machete as they were leaving, promising to kill the family and burn down the house if they went to the police.

The boy's mother first told police that she and her boyfriend were not at her home on the date in question, and initially denied that there had been a physical altercation until officers told her that there were witnesses who saw what had transpired. Then, she told police that Pesante, when he went out onto the porch, merely wrapped his arms around the child and lifted him off the cooler on which he was sitting.

However, the boy's brother told police that he had been with the 13-year-old on that day, and both of them were out on the porch together when Pesante came out and held the boy between his shoulder and neck, until their mother intervened.

When police met with Pesante, he told them that he had been meaning to shake the boy by his shoulders for laughing at him, but tripped and fell onto the child. He could not remember if he scratched the minor's neck as he stumbled, he said, but Pesante asserted that he held the boy and prevented him from falling onto the floor as well.

Police arrested Vincente Pesante Jr. and charged him with second-degree assault and aggravated assault and battery as crimes of domestic violence, along with child abuse. The domestic violence laws in the territory precluded the possibility of bail, and he was remanded into custody ahead of his advice of rights hearing on Monday.

No details have been made available of the conditions of Pesante's release ahead of trial following his first court appearance on June 5. Court records indicate that at the time of his most recent arrest, Pesante was awaiting trial on drug and weapons charges stemming from an arrest in January 2020. He is scheduled to be arraigned on these new charges on June 21.