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V.I. Superior Court Denies New York Times Request to Unseal Epstein Estate Reports

Judge Simone VanHolten-Turnbull cited risks of harassment and threats to third parties, including minors, in rejecting media motions to release seven special master reports despite “immense public interest” in Epstein’s finances and co-conspirators.

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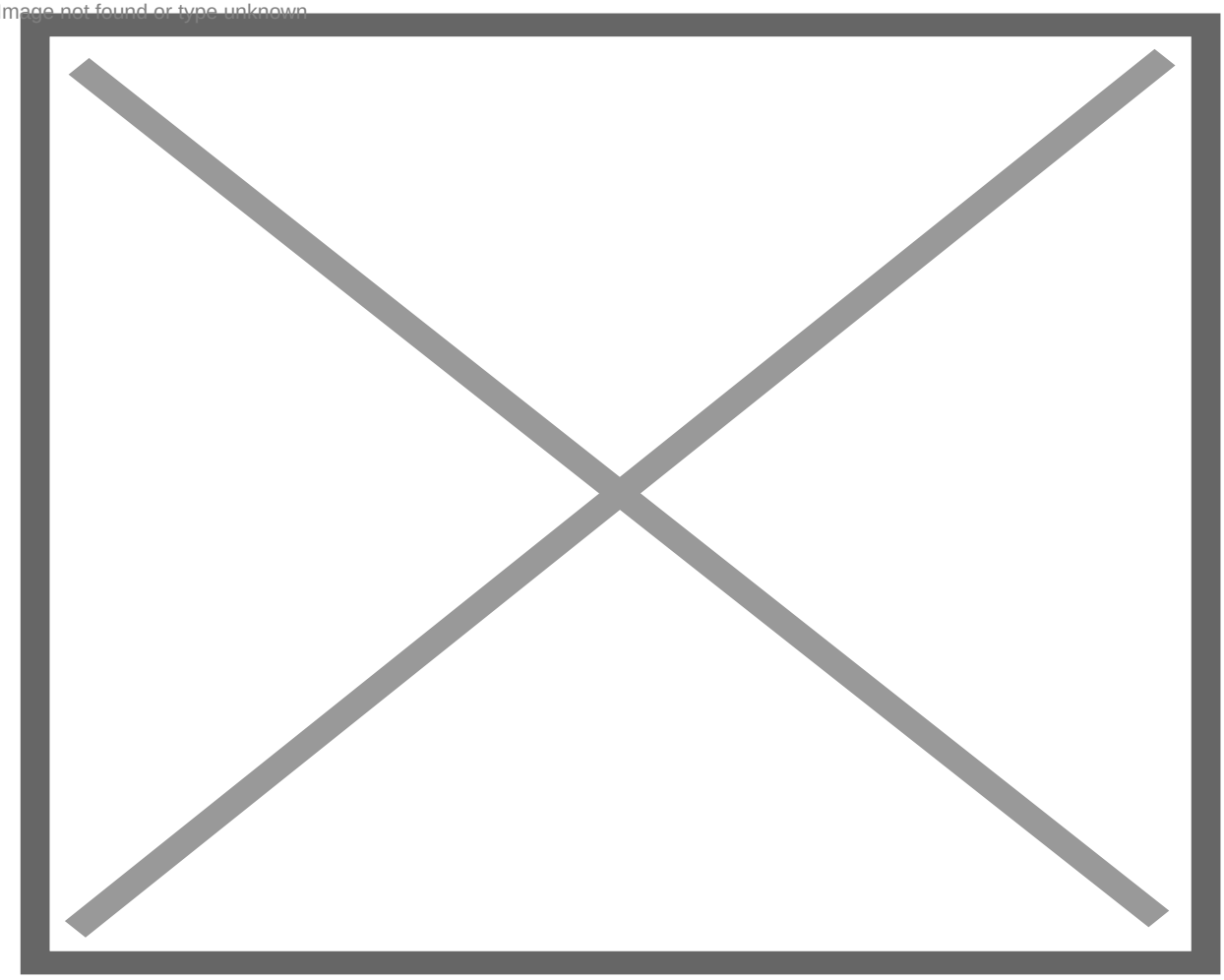

The Superior Court of the Virgin Islands has denied a request by the New York Times to unseal records relating to the disposition of Jeffrey Epstein's estate.

In mid-July, NYT reporter Matthew Goldstein wrote to ask that the court unseal the seven special master reports that have been filed thus far. “I believe these reports should be public because they contain critical information about the finances of the Epstein Estate,” Mr. Goldstein wrote in the

letter addressed to court clerk Tamara Charles.

The reports are “one way for the media, the public and Epstein's nearly 200 victims to make sure that the estate is being properly liquidated and money is going to the appropriate places.” The reports would also be “another way for the public to best learn where Epstein had invested his money.”

With the federal Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigations thus far refusing to make broad disclosure of the information they have collected in their investigations of Epstein, members of the public have been searching for a route to get answers; particularly about who Epstein's co-conspirators might have been in his sex trafficking enterprise.

Counsel for the estate co-executors objected to the request to unseal the special master's reports. Because of the intense scrutiny over Epstein's life and death, “individuals and third-party vendors who may have never met Mr. Epstein but who have been identified as transacting with the Estate are subject to harassment and threats,” argued Christopher Kroblin. The jeopardy that would potentially be faced by these third parties means that the reports should stay under seal, he argued. Additionally, the NYT's argument that local law stipulates that the reports be unsealed is incorrect. Neither does the First Amendment's right of access require the reports be unsealed, Mr. Kroblin insisted.

Ultimately, despite another large publishing firm – the McClatchy Company – joining the NYT's motion, Magistrate Simone VanHolten-Turnbull decided against making the reports public. Acknowledging the “immense public interest” in the case, Judge VanHolten-Turnbull said that there was too much danger to third parties, “in particular minors who were sexually abused” to open up the special master's reports to public scrutiny.

“In an age where one's personal information can become forever present and findable, whether by accidental posting or malicious and perverse intent, it is evermore imperative for Courts to protect sensitive details from prying eyes,” the judge wrote. “By unsealing the requested documents, this Court finds that nothing but unnecessary pain awaits those within.”

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