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Plaskett Seeks Path Forward for Water Spirit as San Juan Docking Restrictions Threaten Cargo Flow

Plaskett said the Water Spirit docking restriction is a supply chain issue affecting residents and businesses, as her office works with the Coast Guard, Puerto Rico Ports Authority, Water Spirit and VIPA to seek a path forward.

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Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett says her office is actively engaged with federal and Puerto Rico authorities over docking restrictions affecting Water Spirit Freight Services V.I., Inc., as concerns grow over the potential impact on the movement of goods between Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Tortola and the wider Caribbean.

In a Friday statement, Ms. Plaskett said her office has been in contact with the U.S. Coast Guard and the Puerto Rico Ports Authority following restrictions imposed on Water Spirit, a St. Croix-based cargo carrier that has provided island-to-island freight service for more than two decades.

The matter has drawn concern because Water Spirit is relied on by residents and businesses for the movement of goods between St. Croix, St. Thomas, Tortola and San Juan. In her statement, Ms. Plaskett said the disruption presents a direct concern for those who depend on the company's service.

"We all recognize this disruption poses a direct concern for Virgin Islands residents and businesses who depend on Water Spirit's freight service for the timely movement of goods between St. Croix, St. Thomas, Tortola, and San Juan," the release stated.

Ms. Plaskett's office said it reached out directly to the U.S. Coast Guard and has remained in continuous contact with both USCG and the Puerto Rico Ports Authority. The office has also contacted Water Spirit to help determine the best path forward, while pursuing "all forms of engagement" to ensure the Virgin Islands has a voice in discussions as authorities work toward a resolution.

"Virgin Islanders depend on reliable cargo service — this is not an abstract maritime matter, it is a supply chain issue that affects real people and real businesses in our territory," said Plaskett. "My office has also reached out to our own local port authority for additional support. We will continue to monitor developments and continue our advocacy for a resolution that protects the uninterrupted flow of goods to and from our territory."

The congresswoman's statement follows [recent concern](#) raised by the Virgin Islands Port Authority, which said it had been notified that the vessel operated by Water Spirit had been restricted from docking in San Juan. VIPA said the matter is specific to the Port of San Juan and falls outside its jurisdiction, as the authority has no regulatory control over Puerto Rico's harbor operations, docking rules, or enforcement decisions made by the U.S. Coast Guard or Puerto Rico Ports Authority.

The U.S. Coast Guard announced on May 9 that Captain of the Port Orders had been issued to two Togo-flagged multipurpose offshore vessels, Water Spirit 2 and Admiral Pride, after the agency said the vessels obstructed the navigable San Antonio Channel while moored at Pier 10 in San Juan Harbor on May 1. Under the order, both vessels will not be cleared to re-enter San Juan Harbor until they demonstrate to the Coast Guard that they can moor in accordance with industry standards without affecting safe navigation in the harbor.

The Coast Guard said the San Antonio Channel is one of the busiest waterways in the Eastern Caribbean, measuring about 1.2 miles long and roughly 300 to 500 feet wide. The agency also noted that some of the world's largest cruise ships call on San Juan and frequently moor across from the area where Water Spirit 2 and Admiral Pride had used a Mediterranean mooring configuration. The Coast Guard said Mediterranean mooring is permitted only when no part of the vessel or its anchors encroaches on navigable channels.

Water Spirit Freight Services describes itself as a family-owned cargo company founded in 2005, providing freight service among San Juan, St. Croix, St. Thomas and Tortola. Its published route schedule lists twice-weekly service from San Juan to St. Croix with a one-day transit time, twice-weekly service from San Juan to St. Thomas with a two-day transit time, and weekly service from San Juan to Tortola with a three-day transit time. The company also lists inter-island routes between St. Croix, St. Thomas and Tortola.

The potential effect on residents and businesses is significant because Water Spirit handles a wide range of cargo categories. The company lists dry goods, refrigerated cargo, produce, vehicles, RVs, boats, heavy equipment, appliances, furniture, construction materials and fragile goods among the items it transports. Vehicles, boats, heavy equipment, containers and large merchandise must be booked in advance because of space and availability limitations.

For residents and businesses, the disruption could mean delayed shipments, postponed pickups, tighter booking space and the need to find alternative carriers for cargo moving out of San Juan. Businesses that depend on scheduled freight from Puerto Rico, including those moving produce, refrigerated goods, appliances, furniture, construction materials and equipment, may be forced to adjust timelines or incur additional costs if cargo must be rerouted.

The issue also lands in a territory heavily dependent on imported goods. Government House has previously stated that more than 95 percent of goods consumed in the Virgin Islands are imported, including food, medicine and construction supplies. That dependence means disruption to even one cargo carrier can ripple through households, retailers, contractors and small businesses, particularly when time-sensitive shipments are involved.

Puerto Rico reporting has suggested that the Water Spirit matter may also be tied to broader cargo dock space challenges in San Juan. Reports have indicated that Water Spirit 2 and Admiral Pride had been displaced from Piers 8, 9 and 10 by a private operator and were awaiting a new space from the Puerto Rico Ports Authority. Puerto Rico officials have also called for additional usable port capacity to reduce congestion and protect the flow of goods.

Plaskett's office said it will continue monitoring the matter and advocating for a resolution that preserves the flow of goods to and from the territory.