

# N.Y. judge allows Epstein victims' claims against Plaskett to proceed | News

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By SUZANNE CARLSON Daily News Staff, Suzanne Carlson

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A New York judge has ruled that victims of Jeffrey Epstein may continue pursuing civil claims in that state against only one defendant, V.I. Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett, according to an opinion filed Friday by U.S. District Court Judge Arum Subramanian of the Southern District of New York.

The victims' attorney, Jordan Merson, filed the lawsuit in November 2023 against the Virgin Islands government and seven officials — Epstein's longtime employee, former V.I. first lady Cecile deJongh; former governors John deJongh Jr. and Kenneth Mapp; former senators Celestino White Sr. and Carlton Dowe; former Attorney General Vincent Frazer, and Plaskett.

The court has granted the six victims anonymity.

The complaint accused the defendants of making the Virgin Islands a "safe haven" for Epstein's sex trafficking, according to the opinion.

Subramanian's order comes more than a year after attorneys Daniel Cevallos of New York and David Cattie of St. Thomas filed a motion to dismiss the case against former Gov. deJongh, or have it transferred to the V.I. District Court.

Subramanian agreed that the New York court lacks personal jurisdiction over nearly all of the defendants, except for Plaskett. The parties have 14 days to apply to transfer the case to another district.

The judge also determined that the victims had signed a release as part of a settlement agreement resolving previous claims against Epstein's estate, which barred them from pursuing claims against Cecile deJongh and all of Epstein's other former employees.

Cecile deJongh worked for Epstein for two decades, before and after his conviction for sexually abusing underage girls in Florida in 2008, and during her husband John deJongh's tenure as governor of the Virgin Islands. She denied knowledge of Epstein's crimes in a 2023 deposition as part of the V.I. government's lawsuit against JPMorgan Chase bank.

The lawsuit filed by Epstein's victims accuses the deJonghs and other Virgin Islands officials of protecting Epstein in exchange for money and favors, even after he was required to register as a sex offender.

Epstein was never investigated or prosecuted in the U.S. Virgin Islands, and he died by suicide in August 2019, while awaiting trial on new charges in a New York jail.

Plaskett's lawyer, Eric Breslin of Duane Morris, filed a motion to dismiss in June, arguing that "The only concrete factual allegations are that she received a small amount of campaign contributions from Epstein and some of his associates, and that she made limited solicitations for campaign contributions and donations. Every other allegation is stated in vague and conclusory fashion, sometimes in direct contradiction of the publicly available information."

While Subramanian agreed that Plaskett did not have any contacts in New York while acting in her official capacity as an employee of the V.I. Economic Development Authority, "she did have sufficient contacts in her personal capacity," while running for office.

She is the only defendant the complaint "alleges ever traveled to New York and the only defendant alleged to have actively solicited funds from Epstein in New York," according to the judge's opinion.

"Here, Plaskett traveled to New York on multiple occasions to access not only Epstein, but also his wider donor network based in the state," Subramanian wrote, and "In Plaskett's case, the money she solicited from Epstein in New York and eventually received is directly related to the alleged quid pro quo to facilitate Epstein's sex-trafficking enterprise."

The New York court also "has a strong interest in protecting its citizens from sexual predators and those who enable them," and the plaintiffs "were New York citizens at the time of the alleged wrongdoing," and were trafficked from the state, according to the opinion.

The case is still in the preliminary stages, and the judge has not made any rulings on the merits of the victims' claims which include allegations that Plaskett "received a position at a law firm associated with Epstein's lawyer, Kellerhals, Ferguson, and Kroblin, that Epstein made the maximum contributions to her campaigns, that Epstein hosted a fundraiser for her, and that Epstein gave her a \$30,000 loan," according to the opinion.

In exchange, the victims' complaint "alleges that Plaskett 'approved over \$300 million in tax breaks for Epstein's companies'" and used her political influence as a Congresswoman to ensure Epstein's clients and co-conspirators had access to the victims, according to the opinion.

The judge noted that "these allegations have not been tested against the evidence," but at this stage, they are adequate for the case to proceed.