# British student Bella May Culley held in Georgia over large cannabis smuggling charges



A British student has found herself embroiled in a serious international incident after being accused of smuggling 30 pounds of cannabis into Georgia. Bella May Culley, just 18 years old and reportedly pregnant, was arrested at Tbilisi International Airport and has since been detained in what is described as a “decaying and overcrowded” prison. Culley is the great-granddaughter of Frank Cook, a former Labour MP who served Stockton North for 27 years and was at the centre of a notorious expenses scandal before his death in 2012.

Culley appeared in court recently, where she opted to remain silent regarding the charges against her, a decision that has prompted concerns for her well-being, especially given the severity of Georgia's drug laws. The circumstances surrounding her arrest suggest a more serious situation than mere possession: she was apprehended as part of a planned sting operation conducted by Georgia's elite Special Tasks Department, which typically focuses on high-profile drug trafficking cases. According to experts, individuals found in possession of large quantities of drugs in Georgia often face lengthy prison sentences, with some receiving sentences of eight years or more for possessing quantities far less than what Culley is alleged to have carried.

Interestingly, Culley’s familial ties come with their own legacy; Frank Cook's tenure as an MP was marred by controversy, including significant allegations of financial impropriety. Among the most notable incidents was a £5 expenses claim for a church donation made by an aide, which led to a high-profile libel case against *The Sunday Telegraph* after the paper highlighted discrepancies in Cook's financial dealings. The court ultimately sided with the newspaper, dismissing Cook's claims of malice and showcasing the intense scrutiny faced by MPs regarding their expense submissions during that era.

While Culley was reportedly enjoying a carefree life, sharing images of travel and leisure on social media, her family claims that she was unaware of the potential dangers she might face in her travels. Her father expressed disbelief at her circumstances, questioning whether she had unknowingly become involved with the wrong crowd. The last moments of her active social media presence raised alarms among her family, who initially feared she might have gone missing during her travels in Southeast Asia before discovering her arrest in Georgia.

Her familial connections add another layer of complexity to Culley's predicament, as they navigate not only concerns for her safety in a foreign penal system but also the shadow of her great-grandfather’s public legacy. The ramifications of her arrest have caught the attention of local news outlets in Georgia, further amplifying the already intense scrutiny of the situation.

As investigations continue, her family is reportedly scrambling to bring a father to Tbilisi while attempting to make sense of the situation that has turned their lives upside down within seemingly mere hours. Observers remain watchful of how this incident develops, particularly given the historical context of her family's struggles within British politics and the present-day legal consequences she now faces thousands of miles away.

In a narrow convergence of past and present, Culley's story raises profound questions about socio-economic conditions, the potential for exploitation of vulnerable individuals, and the often-overlooked human dimension behind headlines of legal controversies.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

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2. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/press/former-mp-frank-cook-loses-expenses-libel-case-2298383.html> - This article from The Independent reports on the libel case filed by former MP Frank Cook against The Sunday Telegraph. Cook had claimed £5 on his parliamentary expenses for a church donation made by an aide at a Battle of Britain service. The High Court ruled in favor of The Sunday Telegraph, stating that the newspaper's comments were protected by the defense of honest comment and that Cook failed to prove malice. The case highlights the complexities of parliamentary expenses and the legal challenges that can arise from them.
3. <https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/8254192.frank-cook-who-represented-stockton-north-for-more-than-20-years-in-expenses-scandal/> - The Northern Echo article delves into the expenses scandal involving Frank Cook, who served as the MP for Stockton North for over 20 years. It details allegations that Cook submitted duplicate claims for DIY equipment purchased in the U.S., where his second wife resides. The claims were made against both his constituency office expenses and his second home budget. The article sheds light on the controversies surrounding Cook's expenses and the scrutiny faced by MPs during that period.
4. <https://www.gazettelive.co.uk/news/local-news/stockton-mp-frank-cook-says-3717485> - This Teesside Live article covers the controversy surrounding Frank Cook's £5 expenses claim for a church donation. The claim was made for a £5 donation to the Battle of Britain service, which was deemed inappropriate. The article includes reactions from local figures, such as Stockton Labour councillor Bob Gibson, who expressed strong disapproval of the claim. The piece highlights the local community's response to the scandal and the broader implications for MPs' expenses.
5. <https://pressgazette.co.uk/publishers/nationals/telegraph-wins-libel-battle-over-mp-expenses-story/> - Press Gazette reports on the outcome of the libel case filed by Frank Cook against The Sunday Telegraph. The newspaper was vindicated after Cook failed to prove malice in the reporting of his £5 expenses claim. The article discusses the legal proceedings and the implications for press freedom, emphasizing the importance of honest comment in journalistic reporting. It also touches upon the broader context of MPs' expenses and the scrutiny they faced during that period.
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7. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/press/former-mp-frank-cook-loses-expenses-libel-case-2298383.html> - This article from The Independent reports on the libel case filed by former MP Frank Cook against The Sunday Telegraph. Cook had claimed £5 on his parliamentary expenses for a church donation made by an aide at a Battle of Britain service. The High Court ruled in favor of The Sunday Telegraph, stating that the newspaper's comments were protected by the defense of honest comment and that Cook failed to prove malice. The case highlights the complexities of parliamentary expenses and the legal challenges that can arise from them.