



**GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS  
DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM**

October 16, 2024

**The Honorable Novelle E. Francis, Jr.**  
Senate President  
Thirty-Fifth Legislature of the Virgin Islands  
Capitol Building  
St. Thomas, Virgin Islands 00802

**Re: Proposed Bill for Cruise Ships to Operate Onboard Casinos in St. Croix**

Dear Senate President Francis, Jr.:

Please find the Department of Tourism's testimony herein for the meeting of the 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands' Committee of the Whole, at 10:00 am on October 16, 2024 at the Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall on the island of St. Thomas.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of the initials "J-B-" with a horizontal line through them.

Joseph Boschulte  
Commissioner  
USVI Department of Tourism

## **TESTIMONY SENATE HEARING 10/17**

Good morning, Committee of the Whole Chairman, Honorable Senator Novelle E. Francis, Jr., Committee Members, and Senators of the 35th Legislature of the United States Virgin Islands, legislative staff, members of the media, and the listening and viewing audience.

I am Joseph Boschulte, Commissioner of the U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Tourism. Pursuant to your invitation, I am here on behalf of the Department of Tourism to provide testimony in support of the proposed legislation that would allow cruise ships to operate their onboard casinos while berthed in St. Croix.

Over the past few years, the Department of Tourism has made significant strides in re-establishing the U.S. Virgin Islands as a premier cruise destination post Covid-19 pandemic. Together with strategic partners from throughout the territory, we have attended premier industry conferences and developed integral relationships that have allowed us to see substantial growth in calls and passenger arrivals, specifically increasing the St. Croix passenger arrivals by 151% since 2021.

This proposed legislation would provide the cruise industry with an added incentive to increase berths at St. Croix's port which could, in turn, increase the number of passengers visiting our shores.

While we know that not all passengers participate in onboard gambling, this proposed legislation makes St. Croix a more attractive destination compared to our competitors. It enhances the value proposition for cruise lines, leading to additional cruise calls, longer port stays, and ultimately a positive economic impact on the island.

Furthermore, this could also present an opportunity to explore partnerships with cruise lines for water provisioning, which would benefit both the cruise lines and the local economy.

As part of the legislation, we suggest the formation of a task force including public and private sector members who could address critical operational needs, such as taxi availability (in coordination with the Taxi Commission), restaurant and retail hours (through the CRRRA), and the marketing of after-hours offerings to encourage passengers to explore the island beyond normal business hours. Additionally, a concerted collaborative effort with the Virgin Islands Police Department to maintain a police presence in high-traffic tourist areas will be essential to ensuring visitor safety across the island.

To ensure industry appeal and long-term success, infrastructure enhancements and improvements are critical in elevating the destination. More specifically, these include modernizing facilities, clean-up efforts in Christiansted and Frederiksted, brush and tree pruning, road resurfacing, lighting, and other necessary upgrades.

In closing, this legislation not only gives us a competitive advantage but also contributes to the overall growth of our tourism sector, ensuring that the U.S. Virgin Islands continues to be a top

destination in the Caribbean. We thank you for your consideration and remain eager to support any further discussions or hearings on this matter.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I stand ready to answer any questions you may have.

###