



VIRGIN ISLANDS OFFICE OF
CANNABIS REGULATION

TESTIMONY

COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT AND
AGRICULTURE

LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN
ISLANDS

RE: BILL NO. 35-0283:
AN ACT AMENDING TITLE 19
VIRGIN ISLANDS CODE, PART III,
CHAPTER 34, THE VIRGIN
ISLANDS CANNABIS USE ACT

PRESENTED BY:
JOANNE MOOREHEAD
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

1 Good afternoon, Senator Javan E. James, Chair of the 35th Legislature's Committee on Economic Development
2 and Agriculture, other members of this Committee, other members of the 35th Legislature present, fellow
3 testifiers, and the listening and viewing audience. I am Joanne Moorehead, Executive Director of the Virgin
4 Islands Office of Cannabis Regulation (OCR), a subsidiary division of the Department of Licensing and
5 Consumer Affairs (DLCA). I am joined today by my OCR Office Assistant, Ms. Lyn-Marie Mc Carthy. Thank
6 you, again, for the opportunity today to provide testimony before this body on Bill No. 35-0283: An Act
7 Amending Title 19 Virgin Islands Code, Part III, Chapter 34, the Virgin Islands Cannabis Use Act, sponsored
8 by Senator Donna Frett-Gregory and Senator Javan E. James, Sr.

9 HISTORY

10 The Virgin Islands Office of Cannabis Regulation was first created pursuant to Act No. 8167, the Virgin
11 Islands Medicinal Cannabis Patient Care Act which was a direct result of a 2014 referendum whereby
12 56.5% of the Virgin Islands voting public voted to support “the licensing and regulation of medicinal
13 marijuana, patients, care-givers, cultivators and distribution centers”. Approximately one year after the
14 passage of Act 8167, the 34th Legislature enacted the more comprehensive Virgin Islands Cannabis Use Act
15 (Act No. 8680). The Virgin Islands Cannabis Use Act recognized the need to expand the Cannabis industry in
16 order to provide additional opportunities for employment and business ownership for Virgin Islands
17 residents, alleviate social injustices experienced by persons subjected to the criminal justice system in
18 matters related to the cultivation, sale, and possession of marijuana, recognized cultural and sacramental
19 uses of Cannabis, and will generate much needed tax revenues for the Territory. This Cannabis Use Act
20 further establishes a holistic, regulated system for the cultivation, manufacture, and sale of Cannabis for
21 adult, medicinal, and sacramental use.

22 Governed by the Cannabis Advisory Board, a body of eleven persons appointed by the Governor and

23 approved by the Legislature, the Office of Cannabis Regulation has the executive authority to implement
24 and administer the provisions in Act 8680 including but not limited to promulgating rules and regulations
25 related to the cultivation, manufacture, sale, dispensary, testing, licensing, and use of Cannabis,
26 prescriptive use of Cannabis, and Sacramental Use.

27 BILL NO. 35-0283

28 I joined the Office of Cannabis Regulation at the end of May 2024 shortly after the Cannabis Advisory
29 Board approved and adopted the Rules and Regulations in April. With those final important guidelines in
30 place, the OCR has been working diligently to establish the framework through which Act 8680 will be
31 implemented. During this work, naturally, we have had occasion to pore through Act 8680 and recognize
32 that there are some areas which could benefit from clarification. So, we thank you for this opportunity to
33 discuss this bill, No. 35-0283, which is the first set of amendments proposed to the legislation.

34 Looking specifically at the draft on blue that was provided to the OCR, we would like to address the
35 following sections of the proposed amendments:

- 36 • Section 1 (b) (1) (A): We agree with your proposed amendments in this section but would like to
37 request additional language that allows for the ex-officio Commissioners to be able to name a
38 designee, if they so choose.
- 39 • Section 1 (g): We agree with the proposed changes to this section but would respectfully request that
40 the date be amended to January 1, 2027 given that we will not have operational dispensaries until 2025
41 and would like to have the opportunity to suggest any changes to the number of licenses using data-
42 based evidence collected for at least one full year's operations.

- 43 • Section 1 (l) (3): We agree with the changes in this section but would like to also add “ and Designated
44 Caregivers after the first instance of “Qualified Patients” in the first sentence, to maintain consistency
45 of changes in other sections of these amendments (e.g. see also number (8) of this subsection).
- 46 • In the last appearance before this Committee, the OCR testified on some proposed changes to the
47 legislation, some of which were not adopted in this draft. Today, we would like to call to attention the
48 omission of one particular section that we believe deserves reconsideration for adoption. In §783(n),
49 the adoption of the changes proposed to the language specifying “Qualifying Patients” as
50 opposed to the current use of “employees” would provide greater clarity and specificity
51 consistent with other changes found in this draft.

52 53 CONCLUSION

54 With the continued support of the 35th Legislature and this Committee, I am certain that the hard work
55 begun by the Office of Cannabis Regulation will continue at great pace so that we may finally realize the
56 full benefits of a thriving medical and adult-use cannabis industry here in the Virgin Islands of the United
57 States. As I conclude, I would like to extend a public thank you to the Cannabis Advisory Board Chair, Dr.
58 Catherine Kean, and the other Board members for their guidance, the Office of the Governor and
59 specifically the Special Advisor to the Governor the Honorable Positive T.A. Nelson, members of this body
60 for their support, and the DLCA team for their unwavering support of the OCR from day one of my arrival.

61 I thank you, again, for the opportunity today to share with your Committee our position regarding Bill No.
62 35-0283 and stand ready to answer any questions arising.