

Access to Racial and Cultural Health Institute, Inc.

“Linking Communities to Resources for Health Equity”



Testimony of Access to Racial & Cultural Health Institute in support of Bill No 36-0105, an act amending title 7 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 13, subchapter III by prohibiting the possession, sale, or manufacture of tetrahydrocannabinol acid, delta-6 THC, delta-8 THC and delta-10 THC products in the Virgin Islands and for other related purposes. Duane Howell, Executive Director.

Good Morning Honorable Senator Clifford A. Joseph Sr., members of the Committee on Homeland Security, Justice and Public Safety. My name is Duane Howell, I am the Executive Director of Access to Racial and Cultural Health Institute, Inc., or ARCH Institute a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization operating in its 22nd While our office is based on St. Croix, we serve and work with adolescents across the territory on emerging health threats. We are also working

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closely with Facing it Together in the Virgin Islands, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization founded by youth to build youth capacity on St. Thomas and St. John.

13% of high school students reported current marijuana use in 2025 as measured by the Core Measures survey. More alarming is only 67.7% of high school students believe there is moderate to great risk in using marijuana. More than 10% of out-of-school suspensions are a result of drug use on campus, primarily some form of cannabinol use. Merchant compliance of underage buyers continues to hover around 66%.

Bill 36-0105 will assist in protecting our most vulnerable population from accessing drugs, these are youth. This legislation is welcomed as it restrict access to Delta-8 and other variations in the local marketplace. But I must reiterate, measures must also fund prevention programs to ensure we build community capacity and increase protective factors for our youth population. In subsection 209 of the proposed legislation, it directs 50% of fines collected to the Agriculture Revolving Fund and 50% to the Consumer Protection Fund. While I agree with the latter, I must ask the bills sponsors to consider amending the legislation to direct the former to a fund to support substance abuse prevention initiatives at the community level. The Consumer Protection Fund is important to support merchant education and to conduct shoulder tap programs ensuring merchants remain in compliance with the law.

While Bill 36-0105 has the potential of reducing access of cannabinol products to the community in general and underage users in particular, consistent compliance checks including

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Shoulder Taps must be conducted. It is a fact merchants compliance rate as measured by various compliance data sources is below fair. What I am not sure about is e-commerce, and how this bill impacts or rather restricts purchasing products online. While the bill bans local merchants from selling these products, it does not address e-commerce restrictions to prevent the shipping of Delta-8 and other variations to the territory. As you know, we live in a resource desert, and local consumers rely on the e-commerce market to access and purchase products.

Delta-8 and other delta variations come in various forms: edibles, oils, tinctures, capsules, vape concentrates, buds and skin products. The later I believe will need to be specified as it is often used in the category of medicinal cannabis, but it is also for recreational use. No different to any other Delta-8 products, skin products are also not regulated and do have psychoactive effects. All these products can easily be obtained from e-commerce marketplace.

Just yesterday, UC San Diego Today published an article entitled *Delta-8 THC Use Highest Where Marijuana Is Illegal, Study Finds*. University of California at San Diego researchers published their findings in American Journal of Preventive Medicine on their research about jurisdictional marijuana bans and users use of alternative products like delta-8 THC. Public policy must take into consideration that banning substances will not curtail use. This is why in the beginning of my testimony I mentioned funding prevention. While Bill 36-0105 will only address one piece of the puzzle, access, but it must be coupled with sound funded public health prevention policies to decrease use, increase perception of risk, and increase protective factors for youth.

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ARCH Institute and Facing it Together in the Virgin Islands believes there is value in Bill No. 36-0105 being enacted. Collectively, we will continue to deploy sound environmental strategies to curtail use and increase protective factors within the confines of our limited funding. While we support this measure, we ask the sponsors and committee to consider identifying funds to support evidence-informed prevention programs and projects, amend where the penalties are being directed and to take into consideration e-commerce access.

I am ready to engage with the committee on the work we are doing to increase protective factors and curtail use.

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