



Government of the United States Virgin Islands
Department of Agriculture



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GOOD MORNING HONORABLE CLIFFORD JOSEPH SR. AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THE THIRTY-SIXTH LEGISLATURE. THANK YOU FOR HAVING US THE MEMBERS OF THE HEMP COMMISSION APPEAR BEFORE YOU TODAY TO TESTIFY ON BILL 36-0105- AN AMENDMENT TO TITLE 7 VIC THAT WILL PROHIBIT THE POSSESSION, SALE OR MANUFACTURING OF TETRAHYDROCANNABINOLIC ACID, DELTA-6 THC, DELTA THC AND DELTA 10 THC PRODUCTS IN THE VIRGIN ISLANDS AND FOR OTHER RELATED PURPOSES.

I AM RIISE RICHARDS, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, AND I SERVE AS THE CHAIRMAN OF THE HEMP COMMISSION. I THANK THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION FOR THEIR CONFIDENCE IN MY ABILITY. IT IS MY HONOR TO PRESENT TO YOU, THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION. I ALSO MUST ADD THAT THIS CADRE OF MEMBERS ARE VERY COMMITTED TO DEVELOPING AN INDUSTRY THAT WOULD UNLOCK SIGNIFICANT ECONOMIC BENEFITS TO THE TERRITORY. THE HONORABLE JUSTA ENCANACION, COMMISSIONER OF HEALTH; DR. JANIS VALMOND, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER-DEPT. OF HEALTH; THE HONORABLE NATHALIE HODGE, COMMISSIONER DEPARTMENT OF LICENSING AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS; MR. HORACE GRAHAM JR. ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER-DEPARTMENT OF LICENSING AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS. MR. IAN CLEMENT, DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL-DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE; HONORABLE MARIO BROOKS, COMMISSIONER OF VIRGIN ISLANDS POLICE DEPARTMENT; THE COMMISSION HAS INCLUDED THE DIRECTOR OF THE PORT AUTHORITY, WHO IS REPRESENTED BY MR. JEROME SHERIDAN, AIRPORT MANAGER. DR. USMAN ADAMU, REPRESENTS DR. SAFIYA GEORGE, PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS. I REPRESENT THE COMMISSIONER OF AGRICULTURE, DR. LOUIS PETERSEN JR. PRESENT WITH ME FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE IS MR. CLIFFORD JOSEPH JR., THE DIRECTOR OF THE HEMP PROGRAM.

IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT HEMP, KNOWN AS CANNABIS SATIVA L IS ONE OF THE OLDEST CULTIVATED CROP KNOWN TO MANKIND. HEMP IS NOT SUITABLE FOR RECREATIONAL USE AND IS BETTER SUITED FOR INDUSTRIAL USE, EG. MAKING ROPE, TEXTILES, PAPER, ANIMAL FEED AND EVEN BEING A FOOD SOURCE. THE 2018 U. S. FARM BILL LEGALIZED THE CULTIVATION AND SALE OF HEMP AND HEMP DERIVED PRODUCTS THAT CONTAIN LESS THAN 0.3% THC. IT IS FOR THIS REASON THAT WE ARE HERE TO FULLY SUPPORT THIS PROPOSED BILL OFFERED BY SEN. JOSEPH. THE BILL SEEKS TO CLEARLY ARTICULATE THE DEFINITION OF HEMP, SO THAT IT WILL BE PROPERLY REGULATED WITHIN THE TERRITORY. WE APPLAUD THE EFFORT TO ELIMINATE ANY AND ALL AMBIGUITIES THAT PRESENTLY EXIST. THE HEMP COMMISSION WAS RECONVENED IN OCTOBER OF 2024 AND IT HAS BEEN VERY ACTIVELY ENGAGED, MEETING ON A MONTHLY BASIS. THE COMMISSION HAS BEEN

VERY CAREFUL IN THE MANNER THAT IT HAS PROCEEDED, BECAUSE OF THE UNCERTAINTIES THAT SHROUD THE EFFECTIVE OPERATION OF THE HEMP INDUSTRY WITHIN THE TERRITORY.

THE COMMISSION HAS GREAT AND BROAD LOCAL GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATION, AS WE HAVE HEALTH, JUSTICE, POLICE, THE PORT AUTHORITY, AGRICULTURE, THE UNIVERSITY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS. ALL OF THESE AGENCIES COLLECTIVELY CREATE THE STRUCTURE THAT THE COMMISSION DOES NOT HAVE BY STATUTE. THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE DOES NOT HAVE STAFF SPECIFICALLY ASSIGNED TO PERFORM ADMINISTRATIVE TASKS, NOR DO WE POSSESS ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS. AS THE HEMP COMMISSION IS PLACED WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE VARIOUS AGENCIES PROVIDE THE RESOURCES THAT ENABLE US TO FUNCTION EFFECTIVELY AS A BODY.

THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE HAS THE PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY OF ISSUING FARMERS LICENSES FOR THOSE PERSONS INTERESTED IN CULTIVATING INDUSTRIAL HEMP. THE DEPARTMENT OF LICENSING AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ISSUING BUSINESS LICENSES TO GROWERS, RETAILERS AND MANUFACTURERS. THEY ARE ALSO RESPONSIBLE FOR ENFORCEMENT OF THE PROVISIONS OF THE LICENSES THAT ARE ISSUED.

ACCORDING TO THE ORIGINAL LEGISLATION, THE VARIOUS AGENCIES THAT MAKE UP THE COMMISSION, MOST HAVE SPECIFIC ROLES FUNCTION INDEPENDENTLY CONCERNING THE INDUSTRY. IT WOULD BE APPROPRIATE TO SHIFT THESE INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE COMMISSION, AS THEY ARE DULY REPRESENTED NOW. THE COMMISSION HAS ALREADY ASSUMED THE ROLE OF FUNCTIONING AS THE REGULATORY BODY BY DEBATING POLICIES REACHING CONSENSUS AND VOTING UPON THEM TO ADOPT THEM.

AS A BODY THE COMMISSION SUPPORTS THE FACT THAT THE LEGISLATION WOULD OFFER CLARITY BY FORMALLY EXCLUDING PSYCHOACTIVE CANNABINOIDS SUCH AS DELTA 6-8 AND 10 THC FROM THE HEMP CLASSIFICATION. THE CONCERN OF THE COMMISSION IS THE POSSIBLE PROLIFERATION OF PRODUCTS COMING IN THROUGH THE RETAIL MARKET, THAT ARE UNTESTED AND COULD CONTAIN DELTA 6---, 8 AND 10 THC THAT ARE OFTEN DERIVED SYNTHETICALLY. THIS DOES POSE A VERY SERIOUS HEALTH AND REGULATORY PROBLEM.

EQUALLY IMPORTANT WOULD BE THE BAN ON PRODUCTS THAT ARE PACKAGED TO MIMIC BRANDS THAT ARE CHILDREN'S SNACKS, BEVERAGES AND CANDIES. THE CONSUMPTION OF THESE PRODUCTS BY CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE POPULATIONS IS AN IMPORTANT PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE.

THE COMMISSION SUPPORTS THE PROPOSED SHIFT IN REGULATORY AUTHORITY FROM THE COMMISSIONER OF AGRICULTURE AND FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY COMPLETELY TO THE HEMP COMMISSION.



WE MUST ASK THAT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE VI HAVE THE AUTONOMY TO CONDUCT THE RESEARCH THAT WILL ALLOW FOR THE GROWTH, DEVELOPMENT AND STABILITY OF THE INDUSTRY.

THERE WILL BE MORE DETAILED PRESENTATIONS FROM THE DEPARTMENTS OF HEALTH AND LICENSING AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS IN SUPPORT OF THE LEGISLATION.

IN CONCLUSION, THE COMMISSION WOULD LIKE TO EXPRESS OUR APPRECIATION TO YOU SEN. JOSEPH AND OTHER SENATORS FOR AFFORDING US THIS OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE A MEANING-FUL DIAOGUE WITH YOU AND TO WORK ON THIS MEANINGFUL PIECE OF LEGISLATION.EQUALLY IMPORTANT IS THE NEED FOR FUNDING TO OPERATE THE COMMISSION, TRAVEL, PRODUCT TESTING AND TRAINING. OUR FUNDING REQUEST WOULD BE ABOUT \$50,00.00 OF NEW FUNDS.

WE WOULD ALSO ASK THAT THE LEGISLATION GRANT THE COMMISSION THE AUTHORITY TO SET THE FEE FOR LICENSES AND THAT THESE FUNDS BE DEPOSITED INTO AN ACCOUNT SPECIFICALLY TO SUPPORT HEMP COMMISSION. IT IS IMPORTANT FOR THIS COMMISSION TO WORK TOWARDS ENSURING THAT WE HAVE PUT INTO PLACE A COMMISSION THAT FUNCTIONS EFFECTIVELY AND EFFICIENTLY TO MAKE SURE THAT THE HEMP INDUSTRY FUNCTIONS AS A SAFE AND VIABLE INDUSTRY.

THANK YOU FOR ALLOWING ME TO MAKE THIS PRESENTATION AND FOR MY COLLEAGUES ALSO TO MAKE THEIR PRESENTATIONS.

