

Good day Honorable Carla Joseph, Chair Rules Committee and other Members of the thirty-sixth Legislature. Thank you for giving us members of the Hemp Commission another opportunity to express our avid support for this piece of legislation, specifically Bill no 36-0105-an amendment to Title 7VIC that would prohibit the possession, sale or manufacturing of tetrahydrocannabinolic acid, delta-9-THC, Delta-8-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. Please allow me to introduce the other members of the Commission: The Honorable Justa Encarnacion, Commissioner of Health; Dr. Janis Valmond-Deputy Commissioner-Dept. of Health; The Honorable Nathalie Hodge-Commissioner of Licensing and Consumer Affairs; Mr. Horace Graham Jr.-Asst. Commissioner of Licensing and Consumer Affairs; Mr. Ian Clement Esq. -Asst. Deputy Attorney General-Dept. of Justice; The Honorable Mario Brooks-Police Commissioner; The Commission voted to include representation from the Port Authority in the person of Mr. Jerome Sheridan; Dr. Usman Adamu represents Dr. Safiya George, President of the University of the Virgin Islands. I represent the Commissioner of Agriculture the Honorable Louis E. Petersen Jr. PH.D. We also have Mr. Clifford Joseph, Director of the Hemp Program from the Dept. of Agriculture.

Hemp known as Cannabis Sativa L is one of the oldest cultivated crops known to humankind. Hemp, unlike Cannabis, is not suitable for recreational or medicinal use, it has industrial use. Unfortunately, the Farm Bill of 2018 legalized the cultivation and sale of hemp and hemp derived products that contain less than 0.3% THC. This act of legalization did not include any restrictions on the type of products that can be harmful to consumers, especially young people.

This legislation seeks to ban these substances that are very dangerous for human consumption. Delta-8-THC is found in the Cannabis sativa plant of which marijuana and hemp are two varieties. Delta-8-THC is one of over 100 cannabinoids produced naturally by the cannabis plant but it is not found in significant quantities. Because these concentrated amounts of delta-8-THC are usually manufactured from hemp-derived cannabidiol (CBD).

The revised legislation is impressive as it now clearly gives full authority for the licensing and regulation of the industry to the Commission. The legislation also clearly defines what products are acceptable to be sold in our local markets. The bill also documents the experiences that consumers have had with these products that are adverse. These concerns were addressed in testimony in the first hearing, and they have now been made a part of the revised legislation. I am sure that the members of the Commission would be pleased that their concerns have been incorporated into the document to augment the legislation.

On behalf of the Commission members we fully support this revised legislation and we look forward to confidently exercising our authority to regulate the Industrial Hemp program.

The Commission members also appreciate the fact that we have a means of funding to enforce the provisions of the statute; for allowing the members to testify to this important piece of legislation and thank you for being expedient in addressing this urgent need for regulation of the industry.

As I conclude, please accept our appreciation for the attention that is being given to the legislation; for allowing us to express our support and concerns. We are available to answer any questions that you may have. Thank you all again.