

## LIVESTOCK AND SMALL BUSINESS LEGISLATION SENT TO RULES AND JUDICIARY

**Date :** July 19, 2019

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CROIX--the Committee on Economic Development, Regulations and Agriculture chaired by Senator Allison DeGazon held a Public Hearing on Friday in the V.I. Cardiac Center on St. Croix. The Committee took testimony on two proposed legislations. The first was Bill No.0036 an Act amending the Virgin Code by including horses in the definition of livestock. The second was Bill No.0054 pertaining to Small Business Development.

In

her introduction of Bill No.0036, Chairwoman Sen. DeGazon, the bill's primary sponsor, said the reason they wanted to include horses as livestock, was to give horse owners the same grant opportunities and technical support from the VI Department of Agriculture(VIDOA) and the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), as well as the privileges as others who own livestock which are currently denied to them.

According

to her, during the 2017 Hurricane Season, there were several people who had large tracks of farmland with horses who were unable to apply for any of the recovery funds because the code did not consider horses as livestock. She added, according to the requirement, the type of livestock must be clearly stated to qualify them for certain exemptions and opportunities as livestock owners.

In

her testimony, Dr. Bethany Bradford, Director of Veterinary Service, speaking on behalf of Commission of Agriculture, Positive T.A. Nelson said livestock is defined as domesticated animals raised in an agricultural setting to produce labor and commodities such as meat, eggs, milk, fur, leather, and wool.

According

to Dr. Bradford, although horses are considered livestock in the United States, the DOA is banned by Congress from funding horsemeat inspections and it's illegal to sell, serve, or distribute meat that hasn't been inspected.

The

VI Code, Dr. Bradford said, speaks to the production for sale of plants or animals for purposes of human consumption.

Ensuring food security with the territory is the VIDOA general focus.

The

concerns expressed by Dr. Bradford is that they are unsure of the expressed purpose of the Bill especially about the long-term impact on the territory's economy--relative to tax revenue decreases--if horse owners are reconsidered farmers and qualify for tax exemptions based on ownership of horses that are used for pleasure and profit.

Significantly,

said Dr. Bradford, existing farmland will be used for raising horses and will displace existing livestock production and negatively impact the food supply. She also pointed out that the Division of Veterinary Services will be overwhelmed with the expectations and needs of horse owners to provide related services based on this amendment.

Jay

Watson, Chairman of the VI Horse Racing Commission said the Bill is the key component to the horse racing industry.

He added that defining horses as livestock places the territory on the same footing with most jurisdictions and will most beneficial to individuals who are and want to become actively involved in horse racing.

The

Bill was voted out of Committee and sent to the Rules and Judiciary Committee for amendments and further consideration.

Senator

Myron Jackson who sponsored Bill No. 33-0054 relating to Small and Disadvantaged Business Development said the legislation is to provide incentives for small businesses to compete for moneys rewarded to the territory. He added that we must promote equal opportunity for all, including minority and women business owners.

In

his testimony, Lloyd Bough, Jr., Assistant Commissioner of Property and Procurement said they applaud the Community and Sen. Jackson's efforts in identifying initiatives aimed at affording greater opportunities for more business enterprises to participate in the procurement process of the government. Greater participation leads to more competition and more competition provides better value for our community.

The

Asst. Commissioner shared his concerns from their review of the Bill and offered recommendations for its improvements. As a general recommendation, he added, in every instance where the Bill provides for preferences to small and disadvantaged businesses, they recommend adding the word "certified" before each use of small business and disadvantaged business.

Michael

Carty, Small Business Owner of Smart Net VI said the proposed minority business legislation that they are discussing was a step to begin providing a level playing for local businesses. He added that it forces collaboration between large off island firms and locally owned black businesses and if these firms are awarded a contract that a percentage be assigned to a local business.

Other

testifiers on Bill No.33-0054 were Marie R. Gill, Executive Director, Minority Business Development Agency Export and Disaster Recovery Programs; Toussaint Gaskins, Small Business Owner; and Kamal Lathan, Director, VI Economic Development Authority.

The

Bill was voted out of the Committee and sent to the Rules and Judiciary Committee for further consideration.