

ONE OUT OF TWO NOMINATIONS FOR THE V.I. CANNABIS ADVISORY BOARD, THE V.I. TAXICAB COMMISSION, AND BILLS MOVES FORWARD

Date : October 10, 2019

ST. THOMAS- Members of the Committee on Rules and Judiciary chaired by Sen. Janelle K. Sarauw, convened in a meeting at the Capitol Building on Thursday, and voted to hold in committee the nomination of the V.I. Department of Agriculture Commissioner Positive T.A. Nelson to serve on the V.I. Cannabis Board. However, the nomination for The V.I. Department of Health Assistant Commissioner Nicole Craigwell-Syms, Ph.D. to serve as a member of the V.I. Cannabis Advisory Board advanced. Senators also voted favorably for three nominees to serve on the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission and for several bills. The nominations were sent to the Legislature by Governor Albert Bryan; set forth from Section (16) of the Revised Organic Act of 1954, and Title 3, Section 65a of the Virgin Islands Code. All items approved will be forwarded to the full body for further consideration.

Nominee Nelson noted that his years of experience, skills, and advocacy to promote the use of medicinal cannabis has equipped him to serve on the Virgin Islands Cannabis Advisory Board. Furthermore, he stated that thirty-four states across the United States, two U.S. territories, and one Commonwealth have legalized the use of medicinal marijuana. However, senators stated that interisland transporting of that type of medicine may infringe upon Federal Laws. "The interisland transportation of medicinal cannabis in Federal Zones can lead to legal problems for our residents," said Sen. Sarauw. Similarly, Sen. Kenneth Gittens noted that "It is important that law-abiding Virgin Islanders do not end up on the wrong side of the law who are employed in the Medicinal Cannabis Industry." Nominee Nelson mentioned that only authorized commercial vessels with legal documentation can transport medicinal cannabis. The law remains that it is illegal for a private boat to smuggle marijuana into the Territory. Ultimately, the nomination was held in committee for further investigation of "conflict of interest" in lieu of the laws.

Nominee Nicole

Craigwell-Syms, Ph.D. indicated that educating the community by distinguishing the difference of medicinal cannabis and recreational use is a priority. “The Board should also develop education and certification requirements to work in that industry,” added Sen. Javan James. Craigwell-Syms, Ph.D. mentioned that additional goals are to determine patient qualifications and applicable measurement required for prescriptions per diagnosis. Furthermore, she stated that there is a reduction of opioid addictions in the States that offer medicinal cannabis as an alternative treatment method.

Separately, policymakers

voted favorably for the nominations of Loretta Lloyd, Vincent Georges, and Myrna George to serve as members on the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission. The nominees collectively expressed tackling present challenges such as the unloading of passengers in the middle of traffic, the competition of gypsy cabs, and joining the overpopulated taxicab lines at the airport. Sen. Novelle Francis said, “Taxicab Drivers are Ambassadors of the Virgin Islands yet some of them continue to fly flags of other nations on their vehicles. It’s counterproductive to the Tourism product. Policies and Procedures must be in place for proper representation of the Territory.” Senators recommended that the Taxicab Commission offer passengers an electronic option for payment.

Lastly,

Policymakers voted and approved the following measures:

- Bill No. 33-0116 – An Act amending Title 32 of the Virgin Islands Code as it relates to the Virgin Islands Horse Racing Commission.
- Bill No. 33-0033 – An Act to add a new section to title 3, chapter 16 of the Virgin Islands Code, to reenact the Virgin Islands Tax Study Commission which will be tasked with reviewing the current laws and tax structure of the Virgin Islands for initiating tax reform and maximizing revenue fairly and impartially.
- Bill No. 33-0122 – An Act amending Title 7, chapter 1, subchapter 1, section 2 of the Virgin Islands code by expanding the definition of farming and by adding current industry standard terminology.

- Bill No. 33-0123 – An Act to earmark a percentage of the Government of the Virgin Islands budget to support local agriculture.
- Bill No. 33-0068
 - An Act to amend title 20, part II, chapter 32, subchapter I of the Virgin Islands Code by adding a new section to create a process for transferring a vehicle upon the death of an individual, without going through the probate process.

However, the following were held in committee:

- Bill No. 33-0100 – An Act amending title 20, part II, chapter 39, section 436(b)(1) of the Virgin Islands Code by including persons who are disabled within the class of persons exempt from being charged a fee for a disabled window decal.
- Bill No. 33-0151 – An Act amending title 15, part II, chapter 11, section 167 of the Virgin Islands Code by increasing the threshold for summary administration of estates in the Virgin Islands.

Senators

present are Janelle Sarauw, Kenneth Gittens, Javan James, Donna Frett-Gregory, Novelle Francis, Kurt Vialet, and Myron Jackson.

###