

PLASTIC BAG BAN EXTENDS TO INCLUDE PLASTIC STRAWS

Date : October 3, 2018

ST. THOMAS- The Committee on Government Affairs, Veterans, Energy & Environmental Protection, chaired by Sen. Sammuell Sanes, convened on Wednesday to receive testimony amending the plastic bag ban to include disposable plastic straws and other measures.

Amendment No. 32-740 for Bill No. 32-0220, an Act amending Title 29 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 8 sought to extend the ban on plastic bags to include disposable, plastic drinking straws and to allow the sale of reusable drinking straws. Bill sponsor, Sen. Janelle Sarauw, introduced Amendment No. 32-740 to insert a definition for plastic tubular stirrer, prohibit businesses from purchasing and importing plastic disposable straws and stirrers. The measure proposed excluded hospitals, nursing homes and medical supply retailers. "As small as straws may be, they leave a lasting impact on our marine environment. We have already lost 80 percent of our coral reef cover in the Caribbean region," stated Sen. Sarauw. The measure proposed does not apply to hospitals, nursing homes and medical supply retailers.

"I understand the concerns expressed about imported products with straws attached but excluding those items in this amendment does not address the problem at hand," said Sen. Tregenza Roach. He commended the sponsors and the amendments brought forth in today's hearing and recommended that the language of the measure and any amendment should be consistent with its purpose. Sen. Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly stated, "This amendment is a step in the right direction and an opportunity for us to change our footprint and reduce the amount of plastic waste generated in our territory."

Sen. Alicia "Chucky" Hansen previously voted against the bill, citing lack of community input and unclear language for her decision. "The issue regarding our environment is always viable, but it

must be done with caution,” she stated. Sen. Marvin Blyden added, “I agree that the Bill needs more work in regard to enforcement within our communities, as plastic bags are still being offered to residents.”

Amendment 32-740 was forwarded to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary for further consideration.

Bill No. 32-0204, an Act amending Title 12 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 16A by redefining “government agency” and by defining “communications provider”, and requiring that a government agency that installs, relocates, or improves conduits within the public rights-of-way, including a government agency that receives federal funding for such work, ensure that the conduit is of sufficient size to accommodate use by multiple communication providers for their use in providing service, or to permit a communications provider to install its own conduit at its option and cost. “This policy is not new, it has been implemented across the nation in an attempt to reduce the costs of deploying utilities and underground construction,” added Sen. O’Reilly. “It also expands broadband access to rural areas in our community.”

The government agency must also place handholes and manholes for fiber access and pulling with respect to such conduit, must provide reasonable notice to communication providers, and must ensure that any requesting communication provider has access to the conduit for a charge not to exceed a cost-based rate. “I don’t understand the need for this bill based on the research conducted, there is some degree of suggestion that this would impact VInGn and I must err on the side of caution,” expressed Sen. Forde. Members present favorably approved and forwarded Bill No. 32-0204 to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary.

Committee members present at Wednesday's hearing were Chairman Sammuel Sanes, Senators Jean Forde, Marvin Blyden, Nereida Rivera-O’Reilly, Tregenza Roach, Alicia “Chucky” Hansen and Janette Millin Young.

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