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Frett-Gregory Pushes Through Vague USVI Music Festival Bill, With First Event Taking Place No Later Than December 2025

The bill, bypassing committee vetting, now awaits Governor Albert Bryan's final ratification

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Senator Donna Frett-Gregory By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

A bill special-ordered to the Senate floor by Senator Donna Frett-Gregory during the 35th Legislature's last session of the year, calling for an annual music festival in the U.S. Virgin Islands was approved with all but one senator's vote. The bill is now headed to Governor Albert Bryan for final ratification without going through a single committee of jurisdiction for the vetting process.

The bill seeks to establish an annual music festival in the U.S. Virgin Islands, and points to several government-hosted festivals in the Caribbean that are billed as revenue generators. Ms. Frett-Gregory, who has spoken against special ordering legislation to the floor without these legislation being fully vetted through committees of jurisdiction, did exactly that with her new measure, rationalizing that the bill had been discussed with the Bryan administration.

She also defended the measure's purpose. "This particular piece of legislation allows us to begin to compete with the other Caribbean islands," she stated during the Tuesday session. The senator also views the bill as a way to "address some of the economic challenges that we have in this territory."

"I believe that we're in a time where the USVI has economic challenges. We see what's happening in the other Caribbean islands and it's time for us to become competitive," she told the Consortium Wednesday morning.

But the bill, seen [here](#), is very vague. It does not say on which island this annual music festival will be held or when exactly. However, it provides a "December 2025" deadline for the first event to take place. During the interview, she said all the particulars of the festival — from the island to time of year it would be held — will be left up to the Dept. of Tourism. "That is something for the Department of Tourism to figure out. That's why they're in the business and not me," she said.

The senator added, "The Division of Festival, through the Department of Tourism has to do their due diligence to determine whether or not the music festival in the USVI," she said. "It is something that we can do and sustain to ensure economic development."

The bill calls for an invitation to bid to be published by the V.I. Dept. of Tourism no later than 60 days following the enactment. It says all bids "must provide no less than \$1 million or 20 percent of actual festival production costs in cash or value-in-kind sponsorships, whichever is greater." When explaining this mechanism, Ms. Frett-Gregory pointed to large music festivals such as the Creole Music Festival in Dominica, which is wholly organized by the Government of Dominica.

Regarding having a contractor involved to spearhead the USVI music festival, the senator said such an organization was needed to carryout what she expects will be a large event. "We want a contractor, somebody who knows about these large festivals who can assist the territory with making this a reality," she said. "What the vision is, this festival has to be big... so we need to make sure that we are able to stand this up. We need assistance to get this thing done because the [Dept. of Tourism] is very focused on three festivals."

She added, "If it means that this contractor is temporary to help us expand it and then they [Dept. of Tourism] feel that they could take it on, then that's what we would do. We can tweak the legislation."

Ms. Frett-Gregory also said that the Dept. of Tourism may determine that the event is not feasible to be held between the three main festivals, and return to the Legislature to explain its reasons. The U.S. Virgin Islands has three main carnival/festival events: St. Thomas Carnival in April-May, St. John Carnival in July, and the Crucian Christmas Festival in December-January — all of which comes with music festivals called "Village".

Lawmakers across the board supported the bill. "We're giving any entity out there who wants to bid - come show me your best shot, give me your best shot, put on a hell of a show," said Senator Javan James. He lauded the revenue-generating rationale behind the bill. "You invest \$1,000,000, you can get \$8 or \$10 million easily in taxes and fees."

Remembering the St. Croix Jazz Festival, Senator Marise James noted that “we need to get that vibe back with a music festival.” Senator Blyden was excited for the possible benefits of a major music festival in the territory. He used countries including Saint Lucia, Dominica, and St Kitts and Nevis as examples, citing the number of people these festivals are able to attract. “What it does is expand their tourism base,” he said, calling the legislation a no-brainer. “Local promoters will be the ones making the money, local businesses will be the ones benefiting,” he affirmed.

Ultimately, the bill garnered the support of every lawmaker except Senator Francis Heyliger, who voted against the measure. "I think it's a good idea, but we have to continue to allow for promoters and individuals that actually pay taxes to us to be the ones to put on these things," she said.