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OCR to Launch Cannabis Business Licenses "In Weeks," Despite Delays

Office of Cannabis Regulation leader assures lawmakers that the licensing process will be fair and efficient, while addressing concerns about communication and regulatory complexity

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The executive director of the Office of Cannabis Regulation has defended the pace in which the entity is executing its tasks and mandates. Appearing before the Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture on Wednesday, Joanne Moorehead told lawmakers that “we definitely are making progress.”

“It’s always easy to think that things should move faster,” said Ms. Moorehead. “Working for the people of the Virgin Islands, my goal is to do it right.” According to the executive director, the OCR is “taking time to make sure that we put the processes in place so that we don’t have to go

back and redo it, so that we don't make mistakes.” She promised lawmakers that the entity that she manages intends to “do right by the people of the Virgin Islands.”?

The Office of Cannabis Regulation is tasked with implementing and administering the provisions of Act 8680, and generally overseeing the expansion of a legal cannabis industry. Currently, medical patients and or their designated caregivers, sacramental organizations and users and medical practitioners can apply for identification cards and certifications to operate within the legal cannabis industry.

However, business licenses, an area of interest for many, are still unavailable. Ms. Moorehead had positive news in that regard, and testified that applications “will be happening in a matter of weeks.” OCR is working to ensure the cannabis business license application process is “fair, impartial, merit based” and wants to “be able to fold the business license application process into the existing portal,” she told lawmakers

?The software engineering necessary for that process could take “approximately one year,” reported Ms. Moorehead. Fortunately, OCR says it “understands the urgency of having licenses issued as soon as possible” and has “devised a system that allows us to create an intermediary solution that also upholds the integrity of the process.” Approval of the cannabis business license application process is expected to take place during the Cannabis Advisory Board’s September 17 meeting.?

Ms. Moorehead has promised to “publicize the specifics...so that all who are interested can avail themselves of that system.” Lawmakers, however, questioned the success of OCR’s communications efforts to date. “I really have not been having much in the interim in terms of regular updates,” noted Senator Marvin Blyden. In response, Ms. Moorehead blamed “limited staffing” and “some other things that we had to get sort of squared away” for hampering communication efforts. She has promised the next campaign will be “much more comprehensive than what we've been doing so far.”

OCR has also been encouraged to condense the contents of the rules and regulations for the cannabis industry. The document is 130-pages long, described as a “heavy read” by Senator Novelle Francis Jr. “ Are you considering putting in place a Cliff’s Notes version that could help to simplify this?” he wondered. “We do need to increase our social media activity and presence,” admitted Ms. Moorehead. OCR says it will make “pieces of the rules and regulations a little bit more bite-size,” in order to increase accessibility to the public.