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No Inter-Island Sales, Strict Enforcement Plans, and 2025 Launch Timeline Highlighted at Cannabis Office Meeting

OCR outlined key aspects of the cannabis rollout, including restrictions on inter-island sales, strict enforcement plans, and a 2025 launch timeline, while acknowledging several unanswered questions and logistical challenges that remain unresolved

Business / **Published On December 17, 2024 06:25 AM /**

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On Monday, the Office of Cannabis Regulations held an informational session to update the public on the status of the rollout of the regulatory regime for cannabis.

During the approximately 90-minute virtual meeting, OCR Executive Director Joanne Moorehead answered questions from attendees and clarified matters relating to licenses, fees, and

applications.

“We don't have firm dates as yet for all of the licenses,” she disclosed. “What I can tell you is that we are going to be starting with the cultivation applications.” Ms. Moorehead explained that the OCR thought it prudent to do so because “without knowing what kind of supply we're going to have, it's very difficult to then determine all of the other licenses – the dispensaries, the manufacturing etc.” The focus on cultivation licenses will be accompanied by prioritizing requests for qualifications for testing facilities, Ms. Moorehead continued, saying that she hoped “those will be available very soon...the very beginning of the year of 2025.”

Despite her optimism, she acknowledged that “I can't say that I've gotten phone calls about those who are interested in the labs, per se, but I do know third hand from other people that there were people who were interested. I certainly hope that there's somebody interested,” Ms. Moorehead said, observing that having cultivated cannabis tested by a certified laboratory was a legal requirement. Without that key component in place, “I don't know what that would do for the entire process,” she admitted, but nevertheless expressed confidence that “some sort of work-around” would be put in place if the worst-case scenario comes to pass.

Ms. Moorehead reminded attendees that applications for cultivation licenses will vary in cost “depending on how much grow that the applicants are proposing to have,” and urged interested parties to access the complete fee schedule on the OCR website. She also reminded participants that “the awarding of a license for one year is not necessarily a guarantee that you have it forever. It is a revocable privilege.” Despite the vast amount of information and supporting documentation applicants will be required to submit, Ms. Moorehead assured that details of each application will be kept “as private as possible and shared only with the evaluation committee as necessary to conduct merit-based evaluations as is required by law.”

The hope, Ms. Moorehead said, is that once licenses are actually granted, cultivation would be able to begin within six months. She noted that cannabis cultivation will only be allowed “in certain zoned areas that are determined by DPNR.” OCR is working on “a little better mapping of that,” she indicated, “so that people can see where those are a little more easily.” Once prepared, those zoning maps will be available on the OCR website, Mr. Moorehead promised.

With licenses now being issued for the cultivation, processing, and sale of cannabis in the territory, Ms. Moorehead clarified in response to a question that dispensaries in the U.S. Virgin Islands will be restricted to selling cannabis flowers and products that are grown, processed, and manufactured exclusively within the territory.

The OCR executive director acknowledged that several of the questions and concerns raised by meeting attendees did not have a concrete answer at this stage. She could not say for sure whether entities would be able to hold multiple instances of the same license on the same island; such as one individual owning multiple dispensaries on St. Croix, for example. “I'm just not sure how it would work with the limited number of licenses,” she explained. However, she did confirm that the current legal framework did not allow for the transportation of cannabis and cannabis products between islands. “We are working on trying to really nail down how that could work,” Ms. Moorehead responded to that question. “I suggest that you don't try it right this minute,” she advised.

Enforcement of the prohibition on unauthorized cannabis sales is a priority for OCR, Ms. Moorehead assured. “Selling cannabis without a license is just illegal,” she flatly stated, saying that OCR has been collaborating with enforcement agencies including the Department of

Licensing and Consumer Affairs and the V.I. Police Department. She suggested that “once the industry is up and running and in full swing,” enforcement efforts would ramp up accordingly. “We're having conversations with Department of Justice, VIPD etc... we're working through how that will actually work in practice, but it is not a situation or a circumstance that is...being ignored,” Ms. Moorehead said.

Towards the end of the information session, Ms. Moorehead acknowledged the time it is taking for the establishment of a legal cannabis industry in the territory. “We hope that you appreciate that it is a gargantuan task over here with a very, very, very, very small office,” she remarked. However, she promised that despite the meager human resource pool, “we're working. We want to get it out just as much as you do, so that we can get to...regular business.”

“It is coming,” Ms. Moorehead asserted, “2025 I truly think that your patience will pay off, and I am excited for everything that you guys are working on.”

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