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No Quorum, Licensing Delays, but First Cannabis Application Moves Forward

A lack of quorum stalled Wednesday's Cannabis Advisory Board meeting, but Executive Director Joanne Morehead confirmed the first sacramental application is nearly complete, even as cultivation deadlines were pushed to June 27.

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Due to the lack of quorum caused by the absence of four members of the Cannabis Advisory Board, Wednesday's meeting consisted only of an update provided by Joanne Morehead, executive director of the Office of Cannabis Regulations.

"I am very, very happy to tell you that we have our first sacramental organization application," Ms. Moorehead began. "It is nearly complete."

Another practitioner has also applied, she disclosed, bringing the total to eight: four on St. Croix and four on St. Thomas. Patient applications are also rolling in. “I think that is starting to pick up steam,” Ms. Moorehead volunteered. “I think there's a lot of interest in the ability to grow.”

The rollout of the cultivation application suffered “some glitches,” according to Ms. Moorehead. As a result, the deadline for applying for cultivation licenses has been extended to June 27, 2025.

With the application process ongoing, Ms. Moorehead stressed the need for a wide-ranging public education campaign to prepare society for consuming cannabis under a regulated framework. “I think there is a lot of misunderstanding...having decriminalized cannabis does not mean free for all,” she said. “All members of the public must adhere to the Virgin Islands Smoke Free Act.”

The use of cannabis in food will also be tightly regulated, as edible products would fall under the Virgin Islands Food Code.

Enforcement of the regulations is a key aspect to the territory's changing relationship with cannabis, and Ms. Moorehead indicated that the OCR is collaborating closely with the several agencies tasked with enforcing Virgin Islands law. Additionally, the OCR has set up a form to capture complaints from the public. “Once we get closer to licensing and actually even issue licenses, I do expect that we will see an uptick in what I call...community policing,” she predicted. This will be due to “people trying to protect their licensed business interests and alerting the enforcement agencies to activity that is unlicensed.”

The form can be submitted anonymously, Ms. Moorehead added. “You can put in as much or as little information as you'd like.”

In response to a question about whether police would be able to test for cannabis intoxication in a similar manner as they do for alcohol, Ms. Moorehead noted that some additional training might be required for law enforcement officers. In some jurisdictions where the consumption of cannabis is legal in some way, “they have changed the way that they conduct those sort of field sobriety tests...in light of the proliferation of the consumption of cannabis,” she ventured. “I'm not sure legally how it works.”

However, because the effects of cannabis can vary so wildly depending on an individual's physical characteristics and usage patterns, she cautioned that “in terms of being able to set a standard or acceptable level...it's just a difficult conversation that I think science and law enforcement just have to grapple with a little bit more.”

At the end of her presentation, despite the addition of two more board members to the meeting, there was still no quorum, and thus the meeting drew to a close.