

The Virgin Islands Consortium

“Weed Police” Salaries Questioned as OCR Seeks \$1.6M Budget With No Dispensaries Open and Public Confusion Over Cannabis Use

As the OCR seeks \$1.6 million for FY2026, lawmakers question enforcement officer pay, public confusion over cannabis laws, lack of dispensaries, and low revenue while debating whether to approve the agency’s expanded budget request.

Senate / **Published On July 29, 2025 02:59 PM /**

Staff Consortium **July 29, 2025**



With no dispensaries yet open in the U.S. Virgin Islands and cannabis consumption still widely misunderstood, lawmakers are questioning the funding priorities and pace of implementation at the Office of Cannabis Regulations (OCR), which is now seeking a

significant budget increase for fiscal year 2026.

The OCR is requesting \$1,439,917 from the general fund—nearly doubling its FY2025 general fund appropriation of \$790,327—alongside an additional \$200,000 from the Tourism Advertising Revolving Fund (TARF) to support ongoing operations, vehicle purchases, and technology contracts. Executive Director Joanna Moorehead called the request a “modest increase” aimed at supporting the agency’s expanded staffing and operational needs. The request was made during a recent hearing before the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance.

Since the agency’s last budget hearing in July 2024, OCR has increased its staff from one to six employees, including four enforcement officers. The agency expects to spend \$685,000 on salaries, and \$285,550 on fringe benefits, which together comprise a significant portion of the request. New positions include a Deputy Director of Cannabis Regulation.

OCR also seeks to use the \$200,000 TARF request to fund its Metrc compliance software contract and purchase two more vehicles to expand its enforcement fleet. Two specially outfitted vehicles are expected to arrive in September, and four have already been purchased.

Senator Kurt Violet took issue with the current cost structure and questioned what the enforcement officers do each day. “We have no dispensaries open. What are they doing every day?” he asked. While Moorehead stated the officers were “very busy” with site inspections and training, Violet was unconvinced. “It sounds to me like they could be temporarily reassigned,” he said, suggesting they might be more useful at the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs (DLCA).

Moorehead responded that one of the OCR officers previously worked at DLCA and that joint operations are already ongoing between the two agencies. She emphasized that continued education is essential due to the rapidly evolving nature of the industry. “There is a lot of change in the industry on a week-to-week basis that they have to be very knowledgeable about before they go into the streets to enforce anything,” she said.

Violet was especially critical of the enforcement officers’ pay, pointing out that their salaries exceed those of V.I. Police Department officers, who respond to crimes like domestic violence and homicide. “The weed police making \$15,000 to \$20,000 more than them, but then we asking for buy-in from those that have more responsibility overall for the entire community,” he said.

Adding to the scrutiny, Senator Hubert Frederick expressed concern about OCR’s limited revenue. “This is a lot of money we’re spending,” he told Moorehead. To date, OCR has collected \$103,725 in revenue, including \$100,500 from cultivation permit and license application fees, and the remainder from medical and sacramental registration fees.

Moorehead also referenced a remaining balance of \$250,000 from Act 8680, which will be used to purchase two cannabis analyzers and field testing kits to distinguish between legal cannabis and hemp-derived products.

Despite these developments, Violet emphasized the glaring absence of dispensaries and the failure of the program to become self-sustaining. “We are so far in and we still

spending money from the general fund for cannabis and the cannabis office not being able to be self-sustaining,” he said. “It has taken forever to move to the point where we are going to make money. So now we spending \$1.6 million, and everybody’s smoking weed all over the place.”

Vialet described the current landscape as a “free-for-all”, stating that the public wrongly believes public consumption is allowed. He called the situation a “tremendous problem” and questioned how OCR’s four enforcement officers would adequately address it.

Moorehead acknowledged the concern and said her team is working with the Departments of Education, Health, Licensing and Consumer Affairs, and the V.I. Police Department to roll out “collaborative messaging” aimed at correcting public misconceptions and improving enforcement.

Whether the OCR receives the additional funding it is requesting remains to be seen, as lawmakers weigh competing budget needs across multiple government agencies. The Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance is now tasked with determining whether the OCR’s proposed \$500,000 increase is justified in a climate of limited general fund resources.