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Two Decades Later, V.I. Seeks to Activate Dormant Internet Gambling Law Amid Industry Boom

After 23 years of inactivity, the USVI is advancing plans to implement its Internet Gaming and Internet Gambling Act, positioning itself to tap into a multibillion-dollar industry while promising economic growth, regulatory oversight, and safeguards.

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The V.I. is seeking to activate its dormant online gambling law, paving the way for regulated sports betting and entry into a booming national market. By. GETTY IMAGES.

ST. CROIX — The U.S. Virgin Islands took a major step toward reviving its long-dormant internet gaming law with the July 31st Virgin Islands Internet Gaming and Internet Gambling Summit, hosted by the V.I. Casino Control Commission at the Carambola Beach Resort. The

event brought together top government officials, legislators, industry experts, and global consultants to lay the groundwork for implementing the Internet Gaming and Internet Gambling Act, originally enacted in 2001.

The law, known as the IGG Act, has remained dormant for over two decades due to federal legal uncertainties surrounding online wagering. However, with the U.S. Supreme Court's 2018 decision affirming states' rights to regulate sports betting, the path has been cleared for U.S. territories like the Virgin Islands to activate similar laws.

"This summit represents a significant milestone for our territory," said Casino Control Commission CEO Marvin Pickering, noting the need for the territory to modernize its regulatory framework and tap into a market that generated \$13.78 billion in U.S. sports betting revenue and \$8.4 billion in iGaming revenue in 2024 alone.

The Virgin Islands passed the IGG Act on August 2, 2001, but implementation stalled amid concerns over the Interstate Wire Act. In 2018, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act, affirming that states and territories could authorize sports betting. Subsequent Department of Justice opinions clarified that the Wire Act only applies to sports wagering, not all forms of online gambling.

Since then, 39 states, Washington D.C., and Puerto Rico have legalized sports betting in various forms, with 32 of those allowing online and mobile sports betting. Yet, the U.S. Virgin Islands has not capitalized on the market—something the Commission is now eager to change.

The summit featured a comprehensive review of proposed legislative amendments to modernize the IGG Act. Global firms Gaming Laboratories International (GLI) and The Innovation Group presented findings and recommendations to improve oversight, ensure player protections, and align the territory with global best practices.

GLI's team detailed the expansion of license categories, regulatory safeguards, and player protections, including responsible gambling programs, financial transaction monitoring, and anti-money laundering protocols.

The proposed updates also retain the original two Master Service Providers (MSPs) while allowing for additional operators, establishing a structure to ensure competitive access and local economic participation.

Pickering emphasized that this step "is the next, but not the final step in the process." The summit, he said, was designed to build consensus and solicit stakeholder input before legislative amendments are introduced.

Governor Albert Bryan Jr., who had promised to activate internet gaming during his campaign, said, "This has remained on my platform." He praised the summit as a critical first move in tapping into new revenue streams to support infrastructure, healthcare, and prison reform.

Senate President Milton Potter said, "This isn't just about gaming. It's about economic transformation." He called on stakeholders to use this opportunity to shape a forward-looking industry that benefits all Virgin Islanders.

Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach urged caution and social responsibility, sharing concerns about gambling addiction and economic harm. He cited an example of a woman at a gaming center who reportedly tried to convert pennies into quarters to continue playing. "We must be

mindful of who we serve,” he said.

GLI’s presentation emphasized that mobile and online access is now the dominant form of gaming in the U.S., with more than 98 percent of sports betting in states like Ohio happening via mobile apps. They noted that, while internet gambling is already occurring in the Virgin Islands through offshore platforms, a regulated market would bring the activity under local control and ensure tax revenue benefits the territory.

The summit also highlighted measures to protect the most vulnerable populations. Karen Sierra-Hughes, Vice President for Latin America and the Caribbean for GLI, underscored the importance of building a framework that includes collaboration with education, health, and social service agencies.

As part of the summit’s goals, stakeholders were encouraged to scan QR codes to access draft legislation and submit questions or feedback. Final draft amendments are expected to be submitted to the Legislature in the near future, after public input is considered.

“The work continues, and today, we have taken an important step forward,” said Pickering in his closing remarks.

The summit also commemorated the 30th anniversary of the Virgin Islands Casino and Resort Control Act of 1995, marking three decades of regulatory history while looking toward a digital future.