

logo not found or type unknown

USVI Told It Can Become Cannabis Tourism Hub as National Usage Surpasses Alcohol

Bernesha Liburd said national trends put the VI in a strong position to attract cannabis tourists through wellness, culinary & retail experiences, while urging lawmakers to finish seed-to-sale tracking, expand staffing & hasten licensing for dispensaries.

Government / **Published On November 21, 2025 06:39 AM /**

Nelcia Charlemagne **November 21, 2025**

Image not found or type unknown



Bernesha Liburd, recently confirmed to the Cannabis Advisory Board, during legislative testimony outlining the USVI's potential in the emerging cannabis industry. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE.

The 36th Legislature has confirmed Governor Albert Bryan Jr.'s nomination of Bernesha Liburd to the Virgin Islands Cannabis Advisory Board, after testimony in which she cited national data

showing that cannabis usage has already outpaced alcohol consumption in the United States. She argued that the U.S. Virgin Islands is well positioned to become a cannabis tourism destination, and outlined a range of cannabis-related experiences the territory could develop to strengthen its economy.

Ms. Liburd, a senior project analyst at the Bureau of Economic Research who has worked in data-driven roles since 2006, told lawmakers that her academic background and professional experience make her “well equipped to support the development of cannabis policy.” She said the territory’s cannabis framework “presents opportunities for economic growth, health care, innovation and social equity for the territory.”

A substantial portion of her testimony focused on the potential economic benefits of Act 8680 and the obstacles that must be addressed to fully realize them. She pointed lawmakers to national research showing that “cannabis usage has outpaced alcohol consumption in the United States, marking a significant shift in societal habits,” positioning the USVI to capitalize on a rapidly expanding market.

“Cannabis can become a key part of tourism in the U.S. Virgin Islands, attracting U.S. citizens who can travel without a passport,” she testified. She described the territory as a “potential hub for cannabis tourism” and identified several experiences that could be incorporated into the visitor economy, including guided dispensary tours, cannabis cooking classes, and CBD spa treatments.

Integrating cannabis into the tourism sector, she said, could “enhance visitor experiences and lead to new offerings such as wellness tourism and culinary experiences, while also creating jobs in cultivation, retail and hospitality.” However, she cautioned that the government should not expect immediate financial returns. “Actual revenue figures are likely to emerge in 2026 once dispensaries are operational and sales commence,” she said.

To meet that timeline, Ms. Liburd emphasized the need to complete foundational regulatory systems. She told lawmakers that it is “crucial to complete the implementation of the seed-to-sale tracking system that is currently under development.” Such “digital monitoring solutions,” she said, will ensure compliance and public safety across the industry.

She also urged policymakers to adopt “cashless transactions,” which may require partnerships with financial technology companies. She noted that the tracking system will be an “essential tool for collecting cannabis data in the USVI, forecasting revenue collections and analyzing market trends while promoting public transparency.”

At the same time, she warned that the Government of the Virgin Islands must address major operational challenges, beginning with staffing shortages at the Office of Cannabis Regulation. She said insufficient personnel are causing “delays in important regulations and leaving many dispensaries not yet able to open.” She recommended “increasing staffing and funding as well as opening district offices across the islands” to support the sector.

“We must accelerate the licensing process for dispensaries and cultivation facilities,” she said. Ms. Liburd urged lawmakers to “consider offering grants and assistance specifically for small-scale farmers, in addition to discounted fees for new cultivators as an incentive.” She highlighted opportunities for “community gardens and cooperative cultivation models” that could “foster collaboration and sustainability in this new, emerging USVI industry.”

Equity was another central theme. Ms. Liburd advocated for “social equity by automating the expungement process of past cannabis convictions and prioritizing equity applicants in licensing

and funding opportunities.”

Her tourism-focused recommendations also included introducing “cannabis friendly tourism packages and lounges that comply with public consumption laws,” alongside strong public education efforts to “inform the community about using legal cannabis responsibly.”

At the federal level, she underscored the need for advocacy around “important reforms in banking and transportation,” two areas that have long posed challenges for cannabis jurisdictions.

“The key to achieving long-term success will be a continued investment in infrastructure, public education and advocacy at a federal level, with a focus on data-driven decision making,” Ms. Liburd said.

Her nomination was approved unanimously.

© Viconsortium 2025