

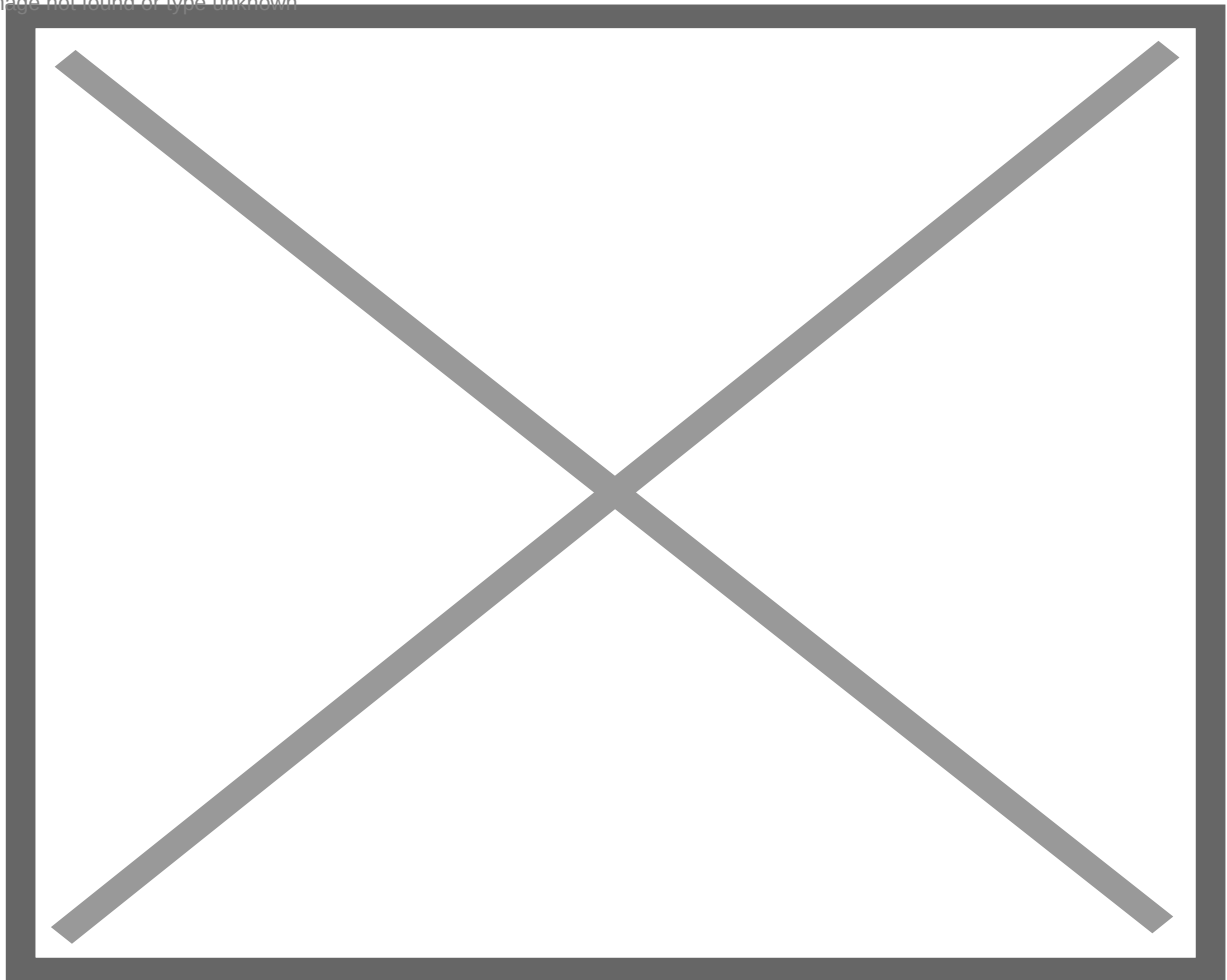
OCR Says Cannabis Cultivation Could Begin Within Weeks, With Dispensaries Opening Before Year-End

Virgin Islands cannabis cultivation could begin within weeks and at least two dispensaries may open before year-end, OCR says, but commercial sales cannot begin until a testing laboratory is operational, with stakeholders targeting October for readiness.

Business / **Published On August 08, 2026 05:34 AM /**

Nelcia Charlemagne **August 08, 2026**

Image not found or type unknown



Licensed cannabis cultivation could begin in the Virgin Islands within weeks, while at least two dispensaries may be ready to open before the end of 2026, Office of Cannabis Regulation Executive Director Joanne Moorehead told lawmakers Friday. Commercial sales, however, cannot begin until a product-testing laboratory is operational, with stakeholders advising OCR that the facility could be ready “by October.”

The update came during OCR's fiscal year 2027 budget hearing before the Senate Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance, where lawmakers pressed the agency over the pace of implementation and questioned whether its fees are sufficient to make the industry financially self-supporting.

Moorehead said OCR continues working toward a marketplace "capable of withstanding scrutiny" and described its broader objective as creating a "safe, transparent, and increasingly self-sustaining regulatory program."

She said the office has been studying the experiences of other jurisdictions as it develops the Virgin Islands system.

Cultivation Could Begin Within Weeks

Sen. Novelle Francis Jr. acknowledged OCR's "preparatory work" but questioned when residents and the government would begin seeing tangible results from the cannabis legislation already enacted.

"At what point will there be a level of engagement to start to see the effects regarding that legislation that have been put in place?" he asked.

"The OCR is working very hard, and we think that there should be some licensed businesses open before the end of this year," Moorehead replied.

She cautioned that not every business holding a conditional license will be prepared to begin operating this year.

Moorehead said some licensed cultivation should begin "within actually probably a matter of weeks, and we should have some dispensary, a dispensary or two, before the end of the year."

Later in the hearing, she said there are "at least two dispensary licensees that are ready to open before the end of this year."

Across the territory, OCR currently has 15 conditionally approved cultivation licenses, 10 conditionally approved dispensary licenses, 10 conditionally approved manufacturing licenses and two research and development licenses. There are also approximately nine microcultivation permits.

Testing Laboratory Remains Critical

Despite the progress, Moorehead said commercial cannabis sales cannot responsibly begin until the territory has a functioning laboratory capable of testing products.

OCR is working to establish a facility "capable of verifying potency, screening for contaminants, and ensuring that products offered to consumers meet established health and safety standards."

A vendor has already been selected, but Moorehead said "delays associated with securing an appropriate facility have required continued coordination among OCR, the laboratory, and other stakeholders."

Until that “critical component” is in place, OCR “cannot responsibly authorize commercial sales,” she said.

Moorehead told lawmakers that unnamed stakeholders have advised her that the laboratory could be ready “by October.”

Francis Presses OCR on Pace of Implementation

Francis questioned whether the process was moving quickly enough, particularly given the potential revenue the cannabis industry could generate.

“I know that this train have already left the station, and I want to make sure that we're able to collect some type of revenues on this,” he said.

Moorehead defended the deliberate approach taken since she assumed leadership of OCR approximately two years ago.

She said the office had examined jurisdictions that “rushed to issue licenses and allowed businesses to open when all of the facilities and infrastructure were not put in place.”

According to Moorehead, “it created havoc” when those jurisdictions later “tried to rein that back in.”

Earlier in her testimony, she said OCR is identifying “evolving best practices” while studying where other regulatory programs encountered problems.

Francis, however, responded that “this is not brand new, though,” and suggested examining successful models elsewhere in the Caribbean and nationally.

“Efficiency remains important, but never at the expense of accountability,” Moorehead said in her testimony.

She also emphasized that simply opening the market is not the only measure of whether the program succeeds. OCR must ensure the system opens “safely, protects consumers, supports compliant businesses, operates transparently, and earns public confidence from the very beginning.”

OCR Owes About \$297,000 to Two Vendors

Sen. Kurt Vialet focused on whether OCR is generating enough money to support its operations and meet its obligations.

Moorehead said the office owes approximately \$297,000 to two vendors: Tyler Technologies and Metrc.

Tyler Technologies provides OCR’s licensing and registration platform, while Metrc supplies the seed-to-sale tracking system.

As of July 31, OCR had generated approximately \$200,000 in revenue during fiscal year 2026.

That compares with \$150,000 collected during fiscal year 2025 and just \$850 during fiscal year 2024.

Vialet argued that the revenue remains insufficient if it cannot cover the office's debts.

"Then something wrong with your fees. Why is the government paying to subsidize marijuana? Marijuana supposed to generate money for the Government of the Virgin Islands," he stated.

He said the General Fund should not be used to "cover the industry."

"The industry is supposed to cover and bring monies back to the coffers of the Virgin Islands, and right now, the fees that you're collecting, we're losing money," Vialet said.

OCR Seeks \$1.61 Million for FY2027

OCR is requesting a total fiscal year 2027 budget of \$1,610,218.

The largest share, \$1,160,218, would come from the General Fund.

Another \$250,000 is requested from the Cannabis Fund, while \$200,000 would come from the Tourism Advertising Revolving Fund.

As the office moves toward opening the commercial market, Moorehead said its work continues to include "compliance, enforcement, [and] inspections."

"Before the first legal cannabis product can be cultivated, manufactured, transported, tested, or sold, government must first establish the systems that make those activities safe, accountable, transparent, and enforceable," she testified.