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Pennies Remain Legal Tender in USVI; DLCA Warns Businesses Against Routinely Rounding Up

DLCA says pennies already in circulation remain legal tender despite the U.S. Mint ending general-circulation production in 2025. Retailers may not routinely round cash purchases upward, refuse cash or eliminate payment options required by VI law today.

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Pennies and other coins sit in a U.S. cash register, illustrating the retail change issue behind DLCA's warning that Virgin Islands businesses must not routinely round cash transactions upward.

Pennies already in circulation remain legal tender in the U.S. Virgin Islands, and businesses cannot use the declining availability of the one-cent coin as justification to routinely round cash transactions upward, refuse cash or eliminate payment options required under territorial law, the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs said Friday.

The guidance comes after the U.S. Mint ceased producing pennies for general circulation in November 2025. Existing pennies, however, remain valid for purchases and other transactions.

DLCA said federal legislation commonly known as the Common Cents Act has advanced in Congress but has not completed the legislative process or become law. The agency also said it remains unclear how the proposed measure would apply to the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Until federal law changes or its territorial application is clarified, businesses and government entities in the Virgin Islands must continue complying with existing local payment requirements, including applicable rules requiring customers to be offered cash and credit or debit card payment options.

A shortage of pennies by itself does not permit a business to stop accepting cash, DLCA said.

Where exact penny change is temporarily unavailable, retailers should not automatically round every transaction upward. DLCA said any cash-rounding system must be fair, consistent, symmetrical and clearly disclosed to customers.

The guidance is consistent with current nonbinding recommendations from the U.S. Department of the Treasury, which call for cash rounding to be handled fairly and transparently while noncash transactions continue to be processed to the exact cent.

“The end of new penny production does not give businesses permission to routinely round every cash transaction upward,” DLCA Commissioner Nathalie Hodge said. “Our message is straightforward: businesses must not use the reduced availability of pennies to overcharge consumers or avoid the payment options required under Virgin Islands law. When exact change is unavailable, Any rounding practice should be fair, transparent, and applied in a manner that does not systematically benefit the retailer at the consumer's expense.”

Retailers are being encouraged to maintain enough coins to provide proper change where possible or establish mutually agreed alternatives that ensure customers receive the full value of their transactions.

Consumers who believe they were improperly denied correct change or subjected to unfair or deceptive practices may file a complaint with DLCA. Complaints can be submitted through the agency’s website or by contacting its offices at 340-713-3522 on St. Croix, 340-714-3522 on St. Thomas or 340-727-3303 on St. John.

DLCA said it will continue monitoring congressional action on the Common Cents Act and issue additional guidance if the legislation becomes law or its application to the Virgin Islands is clarified.

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