

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Senators Approve Amendment To Plastic Bag Ban To Include Plastic Straws, Even As Use Of Plastic Bags Continue Unabated

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Lawmakers on Wednesday approved an amendment to the plastic bag ban, [which became law approximately two years ago](#), to include plastic straws.

But while the amendment -- sponsored by Senator Janelle Sarauw and heard in the Committee on Government Affairs, Veterans, Energy & Environmental Protection, chaired by Sen. Sammuel Sanes -- piles more good intention rules to the 2016 law, there is virtually no enforcement of the current plastic bag ban, as stores territory-wide continue to use plastic bags.

It was upon this observation that some lawmakers took issue with the Sarauw amendment. "The issue regarding our environment is always viable, but it must be done with caution," said Senator Alicia Hansen. Senator Marvin Blyden chimed in: "I agree that the bill needs more work in regard to enforcement within our communities, as plastic bags are still being offered to residents."

Still, proponents of the measure, among them Senator Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly, hailed the amendment as a step in the right direction. "This amendment is a step in the right direction and an opportunity for us to change our footprint and reduce the amount of plastic waste generated in our territory," she said.

The amendment's sponsor, Ms. Sarauw, said, "As small as straws may be, they leave a lasting impact on our marine environment. We have already lost 80 percent of our coral reef cover in the Caribbean region."

But the amendment leaves out hospitals, nursing homes and medical supply retailers; weakening its effectiveness. It also appears that the measure exempts straws that are attached to products. Senator Tregenza Roach took issue with the measure's inconsistencies.

"I think the amendment didn't improve the bill," Mr. Roach said. "And I really wish that I could have supported it going forward, but I can't see why an amendment like that makes sense. I think people and manufacturers across the country are probably going to respond to other jurisdictions [that] impose bans on straws, because it is a national issue... probably a global issue..."

He added, "The same turtle that we see with the straw sticking out its nose, it could be the straw that I get from one of these fast food [chains], or it could be the Capri Sun, Borden Single Serve Milk, or numerous products that come with the straw attached."

The amendment was forwarded to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary for further vetting.