

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Medicinal Marijuana Bill Passes Legislature, Is Now One Signature Away From Being Legal In USVI

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ST. THOMAS -- Senator Positive Nelson's medicinal marijuana bill, after being [introduced in the 31st Legislature](#) and facing seemingly insurmountable odds, was voted favorably on Friday during the 32nd body's last session -- a landmark win for the outgoing senator, who over the years has championed the legalization of medicinal marijuana as well as its recreational use.

Voting in favor of the bill were Senators Tregenza Roach, Sammuel Sanes, Janelle Sarauw, Myron Jackson, Dwayne DeGraff, Bryan Smith and Marvin Blyden. Voting against the bill were Senators Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly, Kurt Violet and Novelle Francis. Senators Alicia Hansen and Janette Millin Young were absent.

Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly's stance on marijuana, which has been consistent from the beginning of hearings, did not change. She said the real intent of the bill was to legalize marijuana altogether. She also contended that the bill violates the Organic Act, which forbids the U.S. Virgin Islands from creating law that contravenes the U.S. Constitution. And responding to proponents who said the ship had already sailed, referring to marijuana legalization, the senator said it was not a ship she would board because it was headed "straight to hell." Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly cited Colorado statistics gathered after the drug was legalized in the state in 2012, which showed an increase in the arrest of Latino and Black men, she said.

Even proponents of the measure supported the bill with reservations, with all agreeing that it has problems that must be addressed.

For Mr. Nelson, though, the victory on Friday was a hard-fought one. "We are at a dawning of a new day," he said during a Nov. 27 hearing, positioning himself, as has always been the case, to be the chief proponent and defender of the implementation of the drug's medical use in the U.S.V.I. "All of the major financial journals, media networks, economists, medical journals and societies, 33 states, Washington D.C. and 3 territories — and 56.7 percent of Virgin Islanders all agree with my position."

Governor Kenneth Mapp is expected to sign the bill into law once it arrives on his desk.