

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bill Seeking To Ban Sun Screen Products Proven To Be Harmful To Human Health And Coral Reefs To Be Heard Monday

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The Committee on Government Operations, Consumer and Veteran Affairs on Monday will hear Bill No 33-0043, an Act amending title 27, chapter 9 of the Virgin Islands Code by adding a section providing for a ban on the retail sale or offer for sale, and the distribution or importation for retail purposes of topical sunscreen products containing oxybenzone and octinoxate. The measure is sponsored by Senators Marvin Blyden Janelle Sarauw, and co-sponsored by Senator Javan James, Sr.

"As we forge forward with stronger and more resilient buildings, roadways and technological infrastructures in the Virgin Islands, I am very mindful to include measures that protect the natural playground of both our children and tourists alike – the beaches; as well as one of our economical ways of life – fishing for sale and food," said Ms. Sarauw.

Ms. Sarauw has been working very closely with colleague Mr. Blyden, governmental environmental agencies, environmentalists, and environmental organizations, reviewing numerous research and studies that have explicitly shown how the use of sunscreen containing the chemicals oxybenzone and octinoxate are not only harmful to human health, but are also harmful to the oceanic ecosystem because of its toxicity to our corals and other marine life, according to a release issued by Ms. Sarauw's office.

"We must protect our coral system and marine life – the very things that bring visitors to our beautiful islands and support our economy. It is time we stopped the toxic sunscreen burn - a measure Island Green has been advocating for since 2016 - and pave the way toward comprehensive sustainability," said Harith Wickrema, president of Islands Green Living Association.

"I am pleased to offer this critically important piece of legislation. The protection of our marine environment and coral reefs is not just protecting our national patrimony, it is also protecting our economy. I am especially gratified to have had the opportunity to work in partnership with Senator Sarauw and with a number of community organizations and the University of the Virgin Islands on this important piece of legislation. I believe it will help to ensure that our coral reefs remain healthy and a viable tourist attraction for generations to come," Mr. Blyden said.

Many other Caribbean islands and places like Key West and Hawaii have already implemented bans on the reef damaging toxic sunscreens, the release said. Scientists studying the effects of these chemicals on reefs have stated that "about 90 percent of the reefs in the Caribbean have disappeared since 1980".

"We want to encourage a healthier and safer alternative in the use of natural sunscreen, but we also have to be aggressive in saving our reefs now by banning harmful sunscreen – that is our responsibility," Ms. Sarauw said. "I will continue to champion and collaborate on measures that protect and/or reverse the harm done to our environment. A cleaner Virgin Islands, both in the health of its people and spaces, only serves to benefit us all."