

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Community Should be Allowed to Weigh in on Recreational Marijuana Before New Law, Gittens Says

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Senator Kenneth Gittens on Saturday called for public hearings to be held territory-wide before the 33rd Legislature acts on Governor Albert Bryan's bill to allow for use of recreational marijuana in the U.S.V.I.

"Such a sweeping change to public policy and the extensive accompanying regulations beg for community review and input," Mr. Gittens said. "The Virgin Islands needs to get this right and ensure that our people will be the ultimate beneficiaries of any such initiative. At this point it is not necessarily about being for or against legalization, but about crafting a realistic regulatory environment."

Last week Mr. Bryan called senators into a Special Session to be held on December 18 to vote on the revamped Virgin Islands Cannabis Use Act. The bill would expand legal marijuana production and use, while creating a system to raise revenues through taxes and other fees.

“I have respectfully asked that the governor consider rescinding his request for a Special Session so that we can assure that the public has the opportunity to be a part of the process,” Mr. Gittens said. “Delaying consideration of this bill by a few weeks is in the best interest of all concerned – particularly for those Virgin Islanders interested in being part of the local marijuana industry.”

The St. Croix senator expressed his thanks to Mr. Bryan for working to develop a new revenue stream.

“The world is moving towards decriminalizing the use of cannabis and the Virgin Islands should have long been at the forefront of this issue given our climate, local sacramental use and other factors. However, we need fully vetted legislation to ensure that the proposed benefits to our community and retirement system are realized,” Mr. Gittens wrote in his letter to the governor.