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Casino Control Commission Says Vialet's Statement on Caravelle Hotel Banquet Hall is 'Inaccurate and Misleading,' Could 'Undermine' CCC's Integrity

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Caravelle Hotel in Christiansted, St. Croix By. CARAVELLE HOTEL

ST. CROIX — The Casino Control Commission on Tuesday responded to comments made by Senator Kurt Vialet regarding commitments from VIGL as a part of its agreement with the government to operate a hotel and casino in Christiansted.

The matter came to the fore in light of Governor Albert Bryan's [veto of a bill](#) sponsored by Mr. Vialet — which was special-ordered to the Senate floor with no substantial debate on the measure — that would have released VIGL from its obligation to build a 400 seating capacity banquet hall at Caravelle Hotel.

Mr. Bryan told the Consortium he vetoed the measure because it was a special-interest piece of legislation that did not go through the hearing process.

"I vetoed it because it's a special-interest bill and what it would have done is it would have meant that nobody who wants to have a casino downtown would have to build anything," he said. "I don't have a problem giving them an ease on the 400 capacity, but when they wanted to build the casino in Christiansted that's what they said they were going to do. That was one of the main reasons for having the casino, so I vetoed it."

Mr. Vialet criticized the governor's decision, contending that it could hurt jobs on St. Croix, and said VIGL held on to all of its employees during the Covid-19 pandemic even as it remained closed. The veteran senator also said the Casino Control Commission had rejected a plan presented by VIGL that would have been implemented in lieu of the banquet hall.

The CCC took issue with the senator's comments, deeming them blatantly false with the potential to damage the commission's standing.

"While the Commission recognizes the importance of conducting business through the channels established by Law, the Commission finds it necessary to address statements that are inaccurate, misleading, and have the potential to undermine the integrity of the office, its functions, and its Members," the CCC said in a collective statement from its leadership, namely chairman and CEO Marvin Pickering and vice chairman and Commissioner Usie Richards.

"The statement printed in the news report, "Mr. Vialet also said the Casino Control Commission had rejected a plan presented by VIGL that would have been implemented in lieu of the banquet hall," is false and incorrect. There has been NO PLAN submitted by VIGL in accordance with the law enacted by the Legislature. Similarly, Senator Vialet's assertion, "Why would we issue penalties during a pandemic for a 400-room banquet facility?", is disingenuous at best," reads the statement.

The CCC further stated, "The Legislature, in enacting the Virgin Islands Casino Resort and Control Act (the "CRCA"), authorized the Commission to enforce the provisions of the CRCA, inclusive of the Commission's orders. As per the Commission's ORDER issued on November 10, 2021, the Commission issued a penalty for VIGL's failure to comply with an ORDER of the Commission after being granted a one-year period (July 14, 2020 to July 14, 2021) to come into compliance with the provisions of 32 VIC, Chapter 21, §435(b)(A), which is a requirement for a Casino License and Operating Certificate.

"It is necessary to point out that all Members of the 34th Legislature of the Virgin Islands received a copy of the November 10, 2021 Order which detailed the Commission's reasons for the penalty. The Commission must also point out that none of the shared reasoning by Senator Vialet was ever presented to the Commission during the one-year period provided to VIGL to come into compliance with Virgin Islands law nor was the Commission given an opportunity to provide testimony during consideration of Bill No. 34-0168.

Mr. Vialet has contended that Mr. Bryan's veto of the bill could negatively impact St. Croix. "After the closure of Limetree and October being one of our lowest months for income tax collections on St. Croix, we are willing to sacrifice jobs. That decision is irresponsible and not in the best interest of St. Croix," he said.

The senator said the VIGL plan to serve in lieu of the 400-seat banquet hall would see the atrium and the upstairs space above the pool at the Caravelle Hotel, including the pool area being

utilized. Those spaces have hosted "a couple hundred people during shows," said Mr. Violet.

Also at risk, Mr. Violet added, is the development of the racetrack on St. Croix "because you need a casino license to run a racino." He explained that the license may be affected if the penalties tied to building the 400-capacity banquet hall are not paid and construction is not completed by May.

"If you look at the footprint, there is no room to expand," Mr. Violet said. "They tried to buy the parking lot between Rum Runners and Holger Banske, but that fell through."

The CCC said its primary duty is to administer, regulate, and enforce the provisions of the Virgin Islands Casino Resort and Control Act. "Considering the comments levied at the Commission for its lawful exercise of its duties, we are compelled to respond to the unsupported comments and to defend the integrity of the process, our staff, and the commissioners," the CCC said.