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V.I. Lottery Confirms Illegal Sports Gaming on St. Thomas

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Lamar Jacobs, the director of Security & Investigations at the V.I Lottery has confirmed that illegal sports gaming is taking place on St. Thomas and that bidders have been warned against it.

He said contractors are suspected of bringing in gaming machines illegally to facilitate the activity. “I would be honest and say, illegally yes,” Mr. Jacobs said in response to the questioned posed by Finance Chair, Senator Kurt Vialet.

Mr. Jacobs said that he could not provide a monetary value of the revenue generated by the use of the illegal gaming machines. “We have not done a study on the sports gaming as of yet. We only have done the illegal lottery games such as Parlay and Bolita but we have not done one on the sports betting.”

Sports betting is considered unregulated in the U.S. Virgin Islands and legal sports gaming has not been written into law. However, there is current recommendation to expand the gaming market by offering it as an option.

Mr. Violet said until that time, any sports gaming conducted in the territory should be considered illegal. "Sports gaming has not been passed by this body. If you have establishments where you can bet on baseball, basketball etc., then those games are illegal. If those games are being conducted by one of the contractors of the government of the Virgin Islands, they need to be told to stop and they should be penalized.

"Games must be approved by V.I. Lottery. They can't go outside the scope of the contract that they have so we need to look as to whether or not their action is a possible fine," he added.

In an effort to curb the prevalence of illegal gaming, the V.I. Lottery has deployed officers to perform surveillance and intelligence gathering that they hope will result in more search and seizures of illegal lottery tickets and other gaming devices.

V.I. Lottery Executive Director Raymond Williams said talks are being held by contractors about working with the American Gaming Association, while the V.I. Lottery is working with contractors on the island. "There's a meeting, I believe next week, that we're going to be participating in, along with our contractors to try to have some product that can help us with problem gaming."

V.I. Lottery Director of Marketing and Public Relations, Victoria Burgess, shared that the agency will also launch an "I am Virgin Islands Lottery/Virgin Islands Lottery is Me" campaign to develop awareness about illegal games through education and enforcement and the introduction of new games.

"Currently on our website we went ahead and uploaded tools so that people can anonymously leave tips," she made known. "So, if you see something, you can go on to our website, click on anonymous tips and you can leave that information."

The agency will also offer a tip line for people wanting to call in and introduce commercials that speak against illegal gaming.

Meanwhile, Mr. Williams shared that the VI Lottery has met with the Caribbean Lottery in Barbados to introduce games that are competitive to the illegal games as a way to discourage people from partaking. He is hopeful that these games will come online by the third quarter of fiscal year 2023.