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Senators Pass Bill to Legalize Recreational Marijuana, Joining 21 States and District of Columbia

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The U.S. Virgin Islands has joined a list of 21 states and the District of Columbia that have approved legislation to legalize the adult use of marijuana for recreational purposes. Governor Albert Bryan is expected to sign the measure into law, which is already veto-proof with 11 senators voting in favor.

The Adult Use Cannabis Legislation was passed alongside [a bill to automatically expunge the records](#) of individuals convicted of marijuana-related crimes and offenses for simple possession.

The amendment to make the expungement of cannabis related crimes automatic forms part of the restorative justice process that will expel previous convictions against cannabis users charged with a crime.

The expungement does not extend to other criminal charges linked to a marijuana conviction.

Light chuckles of victory could be heard across the house, after lawmakers pushed into the early morning of Friday December 30 to pass the cannabis bill and a number of other critical bills during Donna A. Frett-Gregory's last session as Senate President of the 34th Legislature.

"It would be irresponsible of myself to not move this legislation up or down, whichever decision we make this evening, in the 34th Legislature because we spent the government money," Ms. Frett-Gregory said, noting the trip to Denver, Colorado [by 11 of the territory's 15 senators and Governor Albert Bryan Jr.](#)

Colorado was the first state to legalize the use of recreational cannabis.

Senators worked over the Christmas holiday to iron out concerns with the proposed bill and in the end offered [amendment No. 34-699](#) to replace portions of wording in the proposal which was proposed by the majority of senators in the Legislature.

"It became contentious, we almost went to war over cannabis," senator Janelle Sarauw, the sponsor of the bill said lightheartedly.

She said "every single amendment, every single suggestion that members made is included in the amendment in the nature of a substitute."

Ms. Sarauw noted however that a number of procedures still need to be implemented in order to practically move the bill forward.

"Cannabis will be on the governor's desk in no time and we have done absolutely nothing to move cannabis forward. We bawl, I get attack in debates about cannabis and it will be on the governor's desk – rules and regs haven't been promulgated, no seal-to-seal tracking system, nothing has moved with this industry," she said.

The vote to approve the Adult Use Cannabis Legislation was passed with 11 senators in favor, one against, and three absent. The amendment was objected to by Senator Javan James, despite his support of the bill. Mr. James was not given an opportunity to explain his position. Senators Kurt Vialet, Dwayne DeGraff and Milton Potter were absent.

If approved by Governor Bryan, residents and visitors to the USVI will be able to purchase both medicinal and recreational cannabis from licensed cannabis dispensaries once said facilities are active in the territory.

Prior to the approval of the adult use bill, only possession of under one ounce (28 gram) of cannabis was decriminalized in the territory.