

March 24, 2010

The Environmental Association of St.Thomas – St.John
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St.Thomas VI 00804

Virgin Islands Conservation Society
Arawak Building, Suite 3
Gallows Bay
Christiansted, VI 00820

Senator Patrick Simeon Sprauve
Chairman, Committee on Health
28th Legislature of the Virgin Islands
Capitol Building, Charlotte Amalie
P.O. Box 1690
St. Thomas, VI 00804

Dear Chairman Sprauve and members of the Committee on Health,

Unfortunately I will not be able to provide you verbal testimony on Bill #28 -0191 otherwise know as “Virgin Islands Smoke free Act’ however we would like for you to read our testimony into the record today.

As president of the Environmental Association of St.Thomas – St.John and the Virgin Islands Conservation Society it is my pleasure to provide you with our comments on this important bill. We hope that there will be ample opportunity for both districts to provide testimony on each island due to the territory wide effects it will have on the community.

I am sure that many testifiers today will provide you with the many reasons for the enactment of this legislation focusing in on the health benefits. Others might focus the implications of such a ban to our economy. We wholeheartedly approve of this bill for health reasons but we would like to offer several reasons why it should be enacted from an environmental prospective. Carcinogenic emissions from cigarette smoke is harmful and deadly, we all understand that, but if we are about to ban smoking why not go after other emissions? For example why not greater regulate vehicle emissions and CO2 levels standards? What about increasing the fines and demanding stricter enforcement of water pollution and soil erosion laws? We are grateful that a noise pollution bill has been recently approved but there are other forms of pollution that affects us all. Our point is this, why not look at all the levels of pollution in the territory not just with smoke? A Virgin Islands Pollution free Act is certainly a goal to reach one day but sorry I am diverting from the bill offered today.

We understand there is a similar smoking ban bill proposed by Senator Jenny Oropeza, of Long Beach California. It is not as broad in scope in nature as today’s bill, but SB 4 the “No Smoking at State Parks and Beaches Act “would establish a fine of up to \$100 for smoking at a state beach or park. It passed the assembly on Monday and was amended to exclude campsites and parking areas.This act is believed to be the nation's most far-reaching smoking ban in state parks. It is currently making its way to the senate and then to Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger’s approval. The bill offered today is far more punitive than in California and this is a good thing but it all comes down to enforcement. Senator Oropeza bill was endorsed by more than 50 groups and organizations including firefighters, the Sierra Club and other environmental groups. Our organization is in agreement with the reasons given by Senator Oropeza and why a similar bill should be enacted here.

The US Environmental Protection Agency has determined cigarette butts to be the most frequently found marine debris item in the United States.

Smoking-related debris poses a persistent and serious threat to marine life and beach goers. Why should our beaches be treated like one enormous ash tray? Some smokers are good in disposing their cigarette butts but many others are not.

Ingestion of cigarette waste by marine animals interferes with their ability to eat and digest food.

According to the Ocean Conservancy, in 2003 smoking-related items (in the form of cigarette filters, cigar tips, tobacco packaging, and cigarette lighters) accounted for 38 percent of all debris items found on beaches in the United States.

Cigarette butts are not biodegradable and can harm the ecosystem as they contain more than 165 chemicals.

Smoking cigarettes lead to fires and can destroy lives and habitats.

Keeping our beaches and parks free of all litter, including cigarettes has been an objective of our organization and our affiliates for many years. We are constantly hosting beach clean ups and other events every year. If we have strict enforcement of our existing litter laws, including this ban, we can increase our health and welfare of our residents and visitors alike. We look forward to other health and environmental legislation that might be considered in the future and we endorse this bill.

Thank you,

Respectfully yours,

Jason Budsan

Environmental Association of St.Thomas – St.John

Virgin Islands Conservation Society