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BILL NO. 26-0314

**Twenty-Sixth Legislature of the Virgin Islands
of the United States**

August 1, 2006

An Act establishing the St. Croix Cruise Ship Commission to hasten the return of regular cruise ship visits to the island of St. Croix and making an appropriation

PROPOSED BY:

Senators Craig W. Barshinger, Juan Figueroa-Serville,
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WHEREAS, the withdrawal of regular cruise ship visits to the island of St. Croix has had a serious, negative impact on the economy of St. Croix, with increased unemployment and closing of businesses, especially in the town of Frederiksted; and

WHEREAS, the island of St. Croix has lost an annual \$540,000,000 in revenue from cruise passenger activity, and this loss has not been made up in any other business activity; and

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1 WHEREAS, the absence of cruise ship visits in St. Croix has resulted in a further
2 depressed economy that is in need of immediate relief, and consequently it has become
3 necessary to rethink and retool our cruise ship industry; and

4 WHEREAS, present cruise passenger-entertainment needs are not being met and
5 are insufficient to attract regular visits. Therefore, it has become necessary to establish a
6 cruise ship commission to find and implement attractive and creative tourist activities,
7 and market them to the Cruise Lines, in order to obtain long-term agreements with cruise
8 ships to visit the island on a regular basis; and

9 WHEREAS, the island of St. Thomas is an already established cruise destination
10 of first choice in the Caribbean, and has as its agent the West Indian Company based in
11 Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas; and

12 WHEREAS, St. Croix recognizes the continuing preeminence of St. Thomas as
13 the epicenter of cruise ship activity in the Caribbean.

14 WHEREAS, because of the particular needs of St. Croix, and the special
15 attention that is so desperately needed to organize and prepare the island and the people
16 of St. Croix for a renewed cruise ship industry, the Cruise Ship Commission is needed to
17 formulate a plan for implementation in the year 2007; and

18 WHEREAS, St. Croix seeks not to compete with the island of St. Thomas, but
19 must develop a unique product to boost the cruise ship traveler experience that brings
20 passengers who spend money on the island; and

21 WHEREAS, the Government has invested approximately \$15,000,000 for
22 improving the appearance of the Frederiksted waterfront, the Ann Abramson Pier, and the
23 Vincent Mason recreation area to make them more attractive and inviting, and
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considerable work is being done to improve the appearance of the town of Frederiksted;
and

WHEREAS, there is a need for a reliable revenue stream, which the cruise ship will bring to justify the outlay of development revenue, and to attract more private-sector investment in stores and shops, tours, and other needed attractions, to create the desired destination; Now Therefore,

Be it enacted by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands:

SECTION 1. This Act may be cited as “The Cruise Ship Invitation Act”.

SECTION 2. (a) In order to invest in, manage, market, and prepare the island of St. Croix for a renewed cruise ship industry and to hasten the return of regular cruise ship visits to the island of St. Croix. The St. Croix Cruise Ship Commission is established as an autonomous instrumentality of the Government of the Virgin Islands. The Department of Tourism shall work in tandem with the Commission, and the Department of Tourism shall provide clerical services and other necessary resources to the Commission.

(b) The Commission consists of three ex-officio, non-voting members:

(1) the Executive Director of WICO,

(2) the Commissioner of Tourism;

(3) the Director of Port Authority or their representatives, and are ex-officio non-voting members; and

(4) seven voting members from the private sector who reside on St. Croix and are appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Legislature.

(A) The Governor shall select the members of the Commission on the basis of their knowledge of and experience in tourism and tourism-related businesses.

(B) Of the private-sector commissioners, one commissioner must be a member of the St. Croix Chamber of Commerce, one must be a member of the Our Town Frederiksted, and one must be a member of the Federiksted Economic Development Association or the respective successor organization.

(C) The private-sector members shall serve a term of four years, and may be removed by the Governor for cause. Vacancies occurring during the term of any member of the Commission must be filled in the manner of the original appointment for the unexpired term.

(D) Private-sector members shall receive \$75 for each day or part of a day spent in the performance of their official duties. Every member of the Commission must be reimbursed for necessary travel, subsistence and other expenses actually incurred in the discharge of his duties as a member of the Commission.

(E) The Commission shall elect from among its members a chairperson and such other officers as the Commission considers necessary. Four voting members of the Commission constitute a quorum for the transaction of all business of the Commission. A majority of those voting members, a quorum being present shall decide on all matters before the Commission.

(F) The Commission may adopt such rules as it considers necessary to conduct its business.

SECTION 3. (a) The Commission in conjunction with, the Commissioner of Tourism shall;

(1) promote the Virgin Islands, especially St. Croix, as a premier tourist destination in all viable tourist markets throughout the world;

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(2) collect data, monitor and evaluate the world-wide tourist industry and develop strategies that will make St. Croix competitive and desirable as a tourist destination;

(3) communicate and cooperate with all territorial tourist or tourist-related businesses to determine their needs and how best to promote the industry;

(4) develop a high-quality, cost-effective public relations and marketing program for the growth of the St. Croix tourism industry;

(5) gather and distribute statistical information about Virgin Islands tourism, commerce, and industrial development;

(6) promote the development of new tourist attractions for the island of St. Croix;

(7) regularly survey businesses to determine their economic condition and recommend ways and means to assist business and industry to restore and maintain a strong economy;

(8) coordinate with the other departments, agencies, and organizations to promote Virgin Islands culture as part of the St. Croix tourism experience;

(9) promote an understanding of the importance of tourism and the cruise ship industry to the Virgin Island and the St. Croix economies;

(10) develop strategies for the diversification of the St. Croix economy;

(11) promote the hiring of Virgin Islanders in all businesses and industries throughout the Territory;

(12) identify and promote the unique features of St. Croix in tourism advertising;

(13) develop programs for promoting investment in and securing subsidies for the St. Croix tourism industry;

(14) develop long-term strategies for the successful development of St. Croix's economy; and

(15) submit a report of its findings, activities and recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature on a quarterly basis; and

(16) prescribe rules and regulations, consistent with law for the implementation of this Act.

(b) The Commission may negotiate directly with the cruise ship lines and related entities in order to accomplish any of the purposes for which the Commission is established.

SECTION 4. All public agencies of the Government shall cooperate with the Commission and the Commissioner of Tourism in the administration and the enforcement of this chapter

SECTION 5 (a) The Governor shall appoint the seven members of the Commission within 90 days from the effective date of this Act. The Commission shall meet at a time and place designated by the Commissioner of Tourism within 10 business days after the commissioners have been appointed by the Governor.

(b) At this initial meeting, the Commission shall organize itself and begin to formulate a plan of action to carry out the duties established in SECTION 3 of this Act which must be completed within 18 months from the date the commission holds its initial meeting.

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