

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Elections Supervisor Ordered to Apologize to Poll Watcher; Ballot Box Complaint Triggers Legal Review

Following two complaints, the Board of Elections voted for a public apology to Ann Maria Paul Williams and moved to consult the Attorney General on whether current voting practices violate territorial election law.

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Elections Supervisor Caroline Fawkes. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE.

Elections Supervisor Caroline Fawkes owes Ann Maria Paul Williams a public apology, the Board of Elections decided during a meeting on Friday. Board members also voted to seek advice from the Attorney General on the laws governing the kind of ballot boxes that

are required at polling stations.

The decisions were taken as a result of two complaints that were heard during Friday's 3-hour special hearing by the board. The first, from Ms. Williams, alleged mistreatment at the hands of law enforcement and elections officials. The senior citizen worked as a poll watcher during last year's election cycle, she said. On October 14, 2024, at the beginning of the early voting exercise, she says she was at a polling station when she was ushered out into the foyer by the Deputy Supervisor of Elections for St. Thomas/St. John Kevermay Douglas. When she began speaking to queued voters about what was going on, a police officer became irate, and began loudly cursing both herself and a board member who had stopped to intervene, she said. The next day, Ms. Williams contends, seating that had previously been available to her had been removed – a circumstance she ascribes to malice and a retaliatory urge by election officials.

"I don't think I'm gonna ever recover [from] October 14 moving forward," Ms. Williams said. "I am a senior with a disability; I would like to see this election system provide more for people with disabilities."

"I demand respect henceforth," Ms. Williams declared, noting that her complaint to the VIPD had been investigated, responded to and resolved, while her correspondence to the Board of Elections had not even been acknowledged as received until recently. "What I want is an apology in the media," Ms. Williams said. Board Chair Raymond Williams later clarified that she did not mean an apology directed to her personally, but to the public, for what transpired that day.

Elections Supervisor Fawkes denied targeting Ms. Williams for hostility during her time as a poll watcher, or retaliating against her by denying her seating. Deputy Supervisor Douglas explained that the chair in question was removed due to concerns about its placement, but the move was never intended to deliberately inconvenience Ms. Williams.

After some discussion, a first motion to have the board issue an apology to Ms. Williams was narrowly voted down, while a subsequent motion to have the apology come from Supervisor Fawkes instead, was passed.

A second complaint, this one from Mary Moorhead, was ventilated on Friday. She said that there was no suitable ballot box available to her when she showed up to vote at the Claude O. Markoe voting center on November 5, 2024. She wanted to deposit a paper ballot to be hand counted, but was unable to do so. Ms. Moorhead was offered an emergency box within which to place her ballot but informed that it would be scanned and tabulated by machine, not by hand as she wished.

After she waited for several hours for a ballot box of the requisite type to be delivered, Ms. Moorhead says she was approached by a belligerent police officer, who gave her three choices. "He told me...put your ballot in the machine, put your ballot in the emergency bin, or the judge will take your ballot and you will be arrested," she recounted. She was [ultimately handcuffed](#) and led out of the building. "I was denied my right to vote," she declared.

Further to her immediate issues, Ms. Moorhead contended that it was a violation of Virgin Islands law to not offer voters the option of casting a paper ballot. She called for the

deficiency to be addressed ahead of the next territorial election, due in 2026. She too, demanded a public apology for the emotional distress caused “by being marched out of Claude O. Markoe cafeteria in handcuffs when I did not commit any violation of law.”

Supervisor Fawkes insisted that the entire voting exercise was conducted according to the law, and noted that Ms. Moorhead eventually voted elsewhere.

During the discussion that followed, board member Barbara LaRonde said that Ms. Fawkes’s decision to lend assistance to a political party is the reason why ballot boxes capable of accepting paper ballots for manual counting were not available to the public on voting day. “The Supervisor of Elections decided to give them to the Democratic Party just outside of the voting polls to vote for their chairperson, bringing us to this situation today,” Ms. LaRonde declared.

A motion was presented by member Florine Audaine-Hassel and approved by the wider board to write to the Attorney General for his opinion on whether not having a separate ballot box for hand-counting paper ballots was indeed a violation of the law. The letter will also ask for assistance in identifying a similar legal matter relevant to the issue at hand. Suggestions that the board, or elections supervisor, issue an apology to Ms. Moorehead were voted down.