

Board Members Say Fawkes Overstepped Authority in McClafferty Delegate Race Disqualification

After Matthew McClafferty requested a hearing to appeal his Delegate race disqualification, Cleopatra Peter called Supervisor Caroline Fawkes “out of order,” while Peter and Barbara LaRonde argued only the Board can disqualify a federal candidate.

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Board of Elections member Cleopatra Peter, who says Supervisor Caroline Fawkes overstepped her authority in disqualifying Matthew McClafferty from the Delegate to Congress ballot, intensifying a dispute over election powers. By. WTJX.

One member of the V.I. Board of Elections says Elections Supervisor Caroline Fawkes acted outside her authority when she disqualified Matthew McClafferty from the ballot in the upcoming

Delegate to Congress race, deepening an ongoing dispute between some board members and the supervisor over election authority.

The latest disagreement followed correspondence from Mr. McClafferty announcing his intention to appeal the disqualification and requesting a hearing before the board.

Board member Cleopatra Peter responded Tuesday morning, writing that “Supervisor Fawkes is not authorized to conduct any investigation.” Ms. Peter argued that such authority rests with the Board of Elections under Title 18 Section 47 (8) of the Virgin Islands Code.

That [statute](#) states that the Board of Elections has the duty to “investigate election frauds, irregularities and violations of this title, and report all suspicious circumstances to the Virgin Islands Department of Justice for possible prosecution.”

Based on that provision, Ms. Peter argued that Ms. Fawkes, by disqualifying Mr. McClafferty, is “encroaching upon the duties and responsibilities of the Board,” and acted unlawfully. “These actions appear to constitute election interference and harassment,” Ms. Peter wrote.

Minutes later, board member Barbara LaRonde sent an email concurring with Ms. Peter’s position. Ms. LaRonde wrote that “Ms. Fawkes has no legal authority to act on behalf of the Board of Election who is the only body that can disqualify a federal candidate.”

Ms. LaRonde further argued that a candidate for federal office may only be disqualified if that person “has not met the three minimal requirements of the law.”

According to Ms. Peter, the current conflict between the Board of Elections and the Elections Supervisor traces back to [a Senate hearing in September 2022](#). She said Ms. Fawkes “testified in front of senators claiming to represent the board but wasn’t authorized.”

During that hearing, Ms. Fawkes testified in favor of “total election reform,” arguing that Title 18 contained internal conflicts and requirements made outdated by technological advances. Act 8690 emerged from that hearing, and Ms. Peter has argued that the law is itself flawed.

Tension between some board members and Ms. Fawkes has continued since then, including more than one attempt to remove the Elections Supervisor from office.

The most recent effort occurred during an emergency board meeting on June 5. A motion to fire Ms. Fawkes was raised by Ms. LaRonde and seconded by Ms. Peter, but Board Chair Raymond Williams ruled the motion out of order.

Against that backdrop, Ms. Peter and Ms. LaRonde agreed with Mr. McClafferty that an emergency board meeting should be convened to hear his appeal of the disqualification. Ms. LaRonde also said the meeting should “address this misrepresentation of the VI and federal laws.”

As of press time, Mr. Williams had not yet commented on the matter.