

## Fawkes Defends McClafferty Disqualification; Peter and LaRonde Back His Request for Hearing

After Cleopatra Peter and Barbara LaRonde said Caroline Fawkes lacked authority to disqualify Matthew McClafferty from the Delegate ballot, Fawkes cited a signed candidate verification form authorizing the Elections System to investigate his filings.

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A McClafferty for U.S. Virgin Islands campaign sign underscores the Delegate to Congress candidate's ballot dispute; board members have challenged the Elections Supervisor's authority to disqualify him.

Elections Supervisor Caroline Fawkes is defending her decision to disqualify Matthew McClafferty from the Delegate to Congress ballot, after two Board of Elections members argued

that she acted outside her authority and said the matter should be heard by the board.

Mr. McClafferty, who is awaiting word on when his appeal will be heard, disclosed earlier this week that his attempt to seek office as Delegate to Congress had been blocked after Ms. Fawkes wrote to him saying he had been disqualified as a candidate because of a compromised nomination signature collection process.

After Mr. McClafferty vowed to appeal, Board of Elections members Cleopatra Peter and Barbara LaRonde supported his request for a hearing and challenged Ms. Fawkes's authority to make the disqualification decision. They argued that the power to initiate and conduct such investigations rests with the Board of Elections, not the Elections Supervisor.

In emails addressed to Mr. McClafferty and copied to other board members and members of the press, Ms. Peter and Ms. LaRonde criticized Ms. Fawkes as "out of order." Ms. Peter described the Elections Supervisor's actions as "appear[ing] to constitute election interference and harassment."

Ms. Fawkes responded in an email of her own, saying the board members had "fail[ed] to read the documents they received while running for public office."

Attached to her response was a [scanned copy of a candidate verification sheet](#) signed by Mr. McClafferty and notarized the same day. The form authorizes the Elections System "to verify any and all of the information provided by making the appropriate investigation necessary to verify the information" contained in his nomination paperwork and affidavit for candidacy. Ms. Fawkes also included a similar document signed by Ida Smith.

"I read and follow written laws," declared Ms. Fawkes. "I await all the frivolous legal challenges," she concluded.

According to Ms. Peter, the conflict between the Board of Elections and the Elections Supervisor dates 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 that had been made outdated by technological changes. Act 8690 emerged from that hearing, but 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 her from office. The most recent effort occurred during an emergency board meeting on June 5, when a motion to fire Ms. Fawkes was raised by Ms. LaRonde and seconded by Ms. Peter. Board Chair Raymond Williams ruled the motion out of order.

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

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