

Emergency Elections Meeting Ends With McClafferty, Smith Disqualified and Board Tensions Boiling Over

After a nearly 3-hour executive session, the Board of Elections kept Matthew McClafferty and Ida Smith off the November delegate ballot, rejected efforts to read all correspondence publicly, acclaimed Kareem Francis vice chair and ended in open tension.

Election / **Published On July 02, 2026 06:28 AM /**

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From left to right, Ida Smith and Brett Matthew McClafferty.

Neither Brett Matthew McClafferty nor Ida Smith will appear on the November ballot as congressional delegate candidates after the Board of Elections voted Wednesday to uphold Election Supervisor Caroline Fawkes's decisions disqualifying both candidates.

The votes came during an emergency meeting that began with board members going into executive session. When members returned to the public portion of the meeting, they first considered a motion to uphold Mr. McClafferty's disqualification.

Board member Barbara LaRonde objected, pointing out that correspondence from Mr. McClafferty had not been read into the record.

Board member Cleopatra Peter also objected to the motion and suggested the decision rested on weak evidence. "Six letters were sent to Supervisor Fawkes. They were not notarized, some of them don't have no signature, some of them don't have no date on it, some of them don't have no title. And I think that that is wrong."

Ms. Peter also [repeated an argument](#) she has made previously, saying investigatory authority belongs to the board by statute, not to the Supervisor of Elections.

However, the private discussion in executive session appeared to have persuaded most other members. The board voted 7-2 to keep Mr. McClafferty off the ballot. Board member Kareem Francis abstained, while four other board members were absent from the meeting.

The dispute over whether correspondence should be read into the public record continued when the board turned to an appeal by Ida Smith. Ms. LaRonde moved to have correspondence related to the matter read into the record "for the board's edification as well as the public."

"It's on our agenda and I think we should have it appropriately read before we make decisions," she continued.

Board member Liliana Bellardo O'Neal pushed back, suggesting that the nearly three-hour executive session had given members enough time to address any issues. Chairman Raymond Williams, after some effort, ultimately agreed to Ms. LaRonde's insistence that the correspondence be read into the public record.

Ms. LaRonde then quoted from correspondence submitted by Ameera Hodge Smith, who demanded that Ms. Fawkes be fired for allegedly trespassing onto her private property.

"I have filed a police report. The alleged trespass was particularly serious because supervisor election holds a public position requiring integrity, restraint, respect for private property rights and compliance with applicable laws," Ms. Smith wrote. "I demand that Chairman Williams, Chairman Raymond Williams, and the Board of Election of the Virgin Isles promptly investigate this matter, reserve all rights communications, photography, photographs, videos, entry logs, instructions, memorandums, and other evidence related to the alleged entry, and take all lawful steps necessary to terminate the supervisor of elections from employment of the office," she concluded.

Ms. LaRonde was interrupted while reading by Ms. O'Neal, who moved that the reading be waived and that the correspondence be entered into the record. Despite Ms. LaRonde's attempts to continue, Chairman Williams called for a vote, and the motion passed by a strong majority.

A motion to support Ms. Fawkes's decision in the Ida Smith appeal drew objections from Ms. LaRonde and Ms. Peter. Ms. LaRonde suggested that the complaint against the elections supervisor should be handled first. However, eight other board members voted to uphold Ms. Smith's disqualification from the ballot.

The board's final official action during the meeting was to acclaim Mr. Francis as vice chair.

The meeting, contentious throughout, had already been adjourned when board member Lydia Hendricks sparked a confrontation by saying she was disappointed that some colleagues appeared, in her view, to be "acting like personal attorneys for Ida Smith."

Ms. Peter quickly objected, saying she was "not no personal attorney, I'm a board member representing the people of the Virgin Islands."

"You come on this board for me just know I here for you too," were the last words Ms. Peter was able to say before the online meeting ended.

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