

Board of Elections to Decide Next Week On Steps to Mitigate Coronavirus Spread During Upcoming August 1 Primary Election

Politics / **Published On April 17, 2020 06:14 AM /**

Robert Moore **April 17, 2020**

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Voters standing in line close to each other, handling ballots and talking politics is a potentially toxic recipe for community transmission of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). With that in mind, the V.I. Board of Elections is expected to decide next week what extraordinary steps will be taken to mitigate the spread of the disease in the territory during the upcoming Primary Election.

The board met earlier this week to OK a tentative \$2.1 million FY 2021 operating budget, and to discuss whether standard in-person voting in the Primary should be postponed or if voting should be done entirely by mail-in ballots and drop-boxes. A decision on changing Primary Election details was pushed back until a special board meeting set for Tuesday, April 21.

“We have to be very careful. We have to consider how deadly this virus is,” Board of Elections Chairman Raymond Williams told board members, attending Tuesday’s video conference meeting with members online in St. Thomas and St. Croix.

Board members gave themselves another week to draw up final recommendations to the V.I.Senate regarding Primary Election changes. The goal, members said, is to address the practical and legal questions around running an election for thousands of Virgin Islands voters, and protecting those voters from the coronavirus. Board members’ views differed.

Lydia Hendricks was uncomfortable for a mail-in only election. She said voters should have more than one option to cast ballots. Drop boxes could be placed at locations on St. Croix, St. Thomas and St. John for ballots to be deposited, said board member Lisa Harris-Moorhead.

Elections Supervisor Caroline Fawkes said she does not want to see the common filing day of May 12 changed. As per local law, the common filing date is for all aspirants.

Meanwhile, the board voted favorably to send a \$2.1 million tentative budget for the Supervisor’s operations along to the Legislature for consideration later this year. During the last budget cycle, the Senate granted \$1.7 million to the BOE office and \$140,000 for the boards budget.

Correction: April 17, 2020

A previous version of this story stated that Elections Supervisor Caroline Fawkes did not want to see the August 1st Primary Election date changed. That was an error. Ms. Fawkes said she did not want to see the common filing date of May 12 changed. The story has been updated to reflect the correct information.