

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Elections System Tech Coordinator Resigns, Accuses Board Of Creating 'Exception Errors' To Discredit Machines

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Tonjia S. Coverdale, Ph.D., MBA

At a chaotic Joint Boards of Elections meeting Thursday morning on St. Thomas, Dr. Tonjia Coverdale, election technology territorial coordinator of the Elections System of the Virgin Islands, exited the room visibly upset after attempting to give a presentation about why the DS200 machines were good to use on Election Day. Late Thursday night, the *VI Consortium* obtained a resignation letter Dr. Coverdale submitted to Elections Supervisor Caroline Fawkes.

In the letter, Dr. Coverdale chastises the Joint Boards for what she says is its attempt to discredit the DS200 voting machines, and holds strong to her stance that "the machines are logically operating identical to the voting machines that were previously used, in which there was no violation of the Virgin Islands Code, and remain in accordance to the Virgin Islands Code."

Dr. Coverdale was 15 minutes into her presentation on Thursday explaining how the DS200 machines work, when disputes began between her, certain Board members and Assistant Attorney General Kimberly Salisbury.

Coverdale demanded respect be shown to her, eventually exiting the meeting, visibly upset. Certain Board members called for her resignation, including Arturo Watlington, Jr., who commenced an unabridged conversation with Fawkes while this reporter listened on. conversation was being recorded, but Watlington said he did



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"Ms. Fawkes, I don't know what is going to happen now, as a result of what happened," Watlington Jr., said, speaking of Dr. Coverdale's presentation refuting the Board's claim that the DS200 machines are dysfunctional.

"When you have an employee who, in fact, is trying to buck a policy that has already been decided upon, and is trying to do everything to distort what the Body has already decided on, it's a very dangerous thing," Watlington said. "We explained to her why we are doing what we are doing, she disagrees, okay, it's not her call anymore."

Watlington went on to suggest that Fawkes and Dr. Coverdale might have planned the presentation, but Fawkes fired back, saying, "Me ain't plan nothing with nobody -- I don't know what the lady [was] going to present. I'm just saying there was a point in the presentation, where she would explain the problem."

Fawkes also reminded Watlington that it was the Joint Boards who raised the motion to allow Dr. Coverdale to give her presentation, saying, "It was to explain the process," and that she did not know what Coverdale was going to say. Fawkes added that she was surprised by Dr. Coverdale's presentation, however Watlington said he saw it coming.

"No, she did not surprise me because I knew where she was going," he said. "Because we had the discussion [Wednesday] morning and I suspected it. [I told her], 'Ms. Coverdale, you are trying to make a policy decision to reverse a policy decision that has already been made by the Board'."

In her letter, Dr. Coverdale said she remains "extremely disappointed" that after trying to explain the compliance of the DS200 with the Virgin Islands Code to members of the Joint Boards of Elections, she has been dismissed and "outright refuted with uninformed logic."

She continued: "Thus, it appears to me that there is a subjective rationale for their decision to underutilize the DS200 voting machines, which is of great cause of concern for me."

Dr. Coverdale listed a myriad reasons why the DS200 machine is in compliance with Virgin Islands Code, and noted the very same machine is being utilized in 14 states on the mainland.

She added: "I pride myself as a technologist on my impeccable ethics and values and as such, I cannot allow myself to remain in a situation that may compromise my professional credibility both here in the U.S. Virgin Islands or elsewhere. Fully understanding that the election technology does indeed operate properly, I am unable to continue in my capacity and bear witness to the bastardization of the election technology which serves to potentially disenfranchise many voters, instead of supporting them as intended."

Dr. Coverdale offered her resignation, effective immediately, and thanked Fawkes for giving her the opportunity to "help implement election technology in the U.S. Virgin Islands."

Read Dr. Coverdale's full resignation letter [here](#).

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