

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bill Creating One Board Of Election Heads To Full Senate As Gittens Continues Reform Push

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ST. CROIX -- A bill sponsored by Senator Kenneth Gittens that seeks to dissolve the territory's three boards of election and replace them with a single board, [again made its way out of the Committee on Rules and Judiciary](#) on Monday and is headed to the full Senate for further consideration.

Senators had previously rejected the measure based on some concerns, among them language that decreased the membership from the current Joint Boards of Election number of 14 to 9 on the single board. Mr. Gittens on Monday agreed to increase the number to 13, so as to not create a situation where votes wound up tied, which would cause motions to fail. But that too was seen as an issue; and yet another idea to make

the lieutenant governor serve on the board as a tie-breaker was ill-received by testifiers.

Mr. Gittens said an amendment would be forthcoming that would see membership on the single board matching the current 14 on the current Joint Boards, and the bill -- along with another that attempts to simplify language in VI Code to better align with the impending new election laws -- was forwarded to the full body without opposition.

As it stands now, the Joint Boards of Election is comprised of members of the St. Croix and St. Thomas-St. John boards. Mr. Gittens initial goal of limiting the single board to 9 members would see the new board having three elected members from St. Thomas, four from St. Croix, one from St. John and one elected territory-wide — who could be a resident from either district. The new concept will see seven members from the St. Croix district and seven from the St. Thomas-St. John district, with at least two members hailing from St. John.

Later, a bill that seeks to place delegate to Congress candidates in a separate section on official voting ballots was wholly supported by the committee, with Mr. Gittens arguing that the new placement would make it easier for federal officials in case of an investigation.

And measure that would mandate that political parties hold their own primaries was held in committee pending an amendment.

Testifiers present at yesterday's hearing held at the Fritz E. Lawaetz Legislative Hall were Denyce Singleton of the League of Women Voters, V.I. Action Group founder Marvin Forbes, Elections Supervisor Caroline Fawkes, St. Croix Board district Chairwoman Lilliana Belardo de O'Neal, St. Croix board member and vice chair of the Joint Boards Adelbert Bryan, St. Croix district board member Raymond Williams, and St. Thomas-St. John district board members Ivy Moses and Lydia Hendricks.