

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Polling Places In Territory Not A.D.A. Compliant, U.S. D.O.J. Says; Joint Board Asks For Extension To Comply

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ST. CROIX -- The Joint Board of Elections has asked the U.S. Department of Justice for an extension to comply with concerns filed in a June 3 letter from Assistant U.S. Attorney Joycelyn Hewlett, regarding Americans with Disabilities compliance issues at polling locations.

In September, 2012, U.S. D.O.J. surveyed all 31 polling places in the territory, and reviewed 29 of the same locations during the November 2012 General Election. In October, 2014, the department concluded that most polling locations in the territory

included barriers to access for persons with disabilities, and thus the Virgin Islands violated law by failing to select facilities that are accessible to persons with disabilities on election day.

The U.S. D.O.J. requested that the following measures be implemented before election day:

- Portable ramps (including curb ramps) up to and including ramps six feet long, with side edge protection
- Portable wedges or wedge ramps
- Floor mats
- Traffic cones
- Relocating furniture or other moveable barriers
- Door stops
- propping open doors
- Unlocking doors

At at Joint Boards meeting on Thursday, some members argued appealing the U.S. D.O.J.'s findings, and a motion to do so failed. Board member Lisa Harris-Moorhead said it was not wise to go head-to-head with the U.S. D.O.J., and suggested that an extension be requested to give the board enough time -- July 13 -- to come into compliance. That motion passed.

In other action, the board voted to authorize Elections Supervisor Caroline Fawkes to notify the Democratic Party that petitions for the party's offices would be available on Friday, June 24 and must be filed by Friday, July 1.

The board also changed general election early voting dates to October 22-31 as a cost-saving initiative and expected low turnout.