

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Courts And Boards Of Election Unification Bills Head To Mapp

Government / **Published On July 01, 2016 11:56 AM /**

Staff **July 01, 2016**



ST. CROIX -- Senator Kenneth Gittens on Thursday said he was appreciative of his colleagues who supported court and election unification legislation that he brought forward. The measures, approved by the full body on Wednesday during a session at the Earl B. Ottley Legislative Hall in St. Thomas, will change the dynamics of the agencies they affect and the overall community for the better, Mr. Gittens contends.

Bill No. 31-0255 seeks to unify the administration of the Supreme Court and the Superior Court. Mr. Gittens said he was grateful for the support, with 10 out of 15 of his colleagues voting in favor of the measure. Senators Myron Jackson, Janette Millin Young, Positive Nelson, Clifford Graham and Almando Liburd voted against it.

“This is a bill that has been in the works for some time, I think we have finally ironed out most of the kinks that had been bringing concern to some senators. When we look across the nation we see the judiciary branch of government with one head and a defined structure. For us to be any different only sets the stage for conflicts in the future,” Mr. Gittens said.

The second-term Democrat also expressed thanks to his colleagues who supported Bill No. 31-0367 with their vote, as the territory moves toward unifying the [Boards of Election into a single board](#).

“The bill unifies the boards into one 14-member board while I have issued a charge to my colleagues to bring an amendment post haste that would change the numerical makeup of the board. Some of my colleagues are concerned about the number of members on the board, saying that 14 members would cause a problem in the event of a tie vote, so as soon as an amendment comes that addresses that or one that just reduces the number for the sake of futility, we will take action,” Mr. Gittens said.

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.

“I look forward to getting the governor’s approval on these two bills that will certainly bring long sought-after change for the better,” he concluded.