

The Virgin Islands Consortium

A.G. Walker Orders Board Of Elections To Reprint Ballot; Says There Should Be No Early Voting Saturday

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Supervisor of Elections Caroline Fawkes

ST. CROIX -- Attorney General Claude Walker, [in a letter](#) addressed to St. Croix Board of Elections Chairwoman Lilliano Belardo de O'Neal and St. Thomas Board of Elections Chairman Arturo Watlington this afternoon, ordered the Joint Board of Elections to reprint the General Election ballot to come into compliance with Virgin Islands law.

The order comes following a letter written to Elections System Supervisor Fawkes, above, by former Delegate to Congress Donna M. Christensen, stating that she had been

informed by members of the Democratic Party that the party symbol was not next to the names of respective candidates. "That is a violation of the law," she said. "On behalf of the Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands, we insist that the law be followed and the ballots be reprinted in compliance with it."

Joint Board of Elections members acknowledged the flaw, but voted on Thursday against making the changes anyway, following a failed motion in favor of reprinting.

In his letter to the board chairpersons, Mr. Walker said the law was clear on the issue of party symbols.

"I have confirmed that the current ballot for the upcoming November 8, 2016 election does not comply with Virgin Islands law," Mr. Walker wrote. "No party symbol was included as required by the statute. Specifically 18 V.I.C. § 492, [which] states that:

Opposite or under the name of each candidate shall be printed the name of the political party and the political party symbol or political body which nominated him, and opposite and under the name of each candidate nominated by nomination papers which did not specify the name or appellation of the political body which he represents, shall be printed the word 'independent', and at the right of such party name or designation there shall be a square of sufficient size for the convenient insertion of a crossmark.

"You are advised to immediately comply with the statute and correct the ballot," Mr. Walker added.

Mr. Walker also told the board that there should be no early voting tomorrow. Citing local law, the attorney general reminded the board that early voting begins 14 days before an election, and ends on the third day before an election. If early voting were to start on Saturday as the Elections System had planned, it would precede the General Election by 18 days.

"Therefore, early voting should commence October 25, 2016 and end on November 5, 2016," Mr. Walker said. "Your prompt attention to these matters is advised."

In a press release issued late Friday, Ms. Christensen thanked Mr. Walker for intervening in the matter.

"On behalf of the Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands, I want to thank Attorney General Claude Walker for exercising the authority of his office to advise that the Board immediately comply with the law and reprint the illegal ballot. This intervention has hopefully achieved what the Democratic Party was seeking through a planned TRO," she said.

"The Board needs to act on what the territory's Attorney has directed them to do and they need to do so promptly. Any defiance in the face of his letter would cause all of us to question their fitness to serve and to oversee an exercise as important as an election," Ms. Christensen added.

The former delegate also chided the board and Mrs. Fawkes, calling their actions irresponsible.

"The actions of the Board and the Supervisor have been, at best, irresponsible. They had been advised early, by our St. Croix District Chair, that the draft ballot was out of compliance with the law. There was then no excuse for proceeding to print the flawed ballot after the deficiency had been called to their attention.

"Then to add insult to injury, after receiving our letter insisting that the ballot be brought into compliance with the law, the Board once again failed to exercise its responsibility to the public when they voted on 10/19/2016 not to correct and reprint the ballots.

"It does not escape us that the Board's discussion on whether to reprint the ballot or not caused one member to point out that this is just one of many actions that the Board has taken that has flouted the law.

"We are putting the Board of Elections and the Supervisor of Elections on notice that we do not intend to tolerate their dysfunction and illegal actions now or in the future. We demand that they follow the law and urge the voters to take their votes for members of the Board of Elections as seriously as they take those for the Senate," Ms. Christensen concluded.