

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Approves \$145,000 Funding For Apportionment Election

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Governor Kenneth Mapp advised Senate President Myron Jackson on Friday that he has approved funds for a special election so Virgin Islands' voters may consider the initiative put forth by citizens to make changes to the structure of the Legislative Body, Government House announced Friday.

Bill No. 32-0329, now Act No. 8127, provides for a special election to consider a plan to create district senators and at-large senators, and to impose residency requirements. The bill, [passed by senators last week](#), also appropriates \$145,000 to the Virgin Islands Elections System to conduct the special election.

The special election, according to Bill No. 32-0329, will take place on March 30, 2019. If it is approved by a majority of voters, the end result would be no different than if lawmakers had approved it today: the implementation of the initiative, subsequent changes and, inevitably, challenges.

The governor said the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, Julio Rhymer, has already issued the allotment releasing the \$145,000 to cover the costs of holding the special ballot vote.

“Accordingly, the Supervisor of Elections has received the resources to make all preparations to carry out the mandates of this Bill that I have signed into law today,” Mr. Mapp said.

Proponents of the petition see the new arrangement imitating the U.S. setup whereby at-large senators would operate like U.S. Congress senators representing the entire territory, and district senators operating more like those elected to the U.S. House of Representatives — through population and focusing on local issues.

The question that was approved to be asked in April by the Titling Board and placed on the ballot starts by explaining the proposal: “Title 2, Chapter 6 of Virgin Islands Code entitled Apportionment of the Legislature is amended to read as follows: There are five Legislative Districts with 9 district senators and 6 at-large senators: District of St. Croix East shall have two senators, District of St. Croix West Shall have two senators, District of St. Thomas East shall have two senators, District of St. Thomas West Shall have two senators, District of St. John shall have one senator, voted on by the qualified electors of the respective districts. The proposal further states that there shall be six at-large senators, “three shall be residents of St. Croix and three shall be residents of St. Thomas, voted on by the qualified electors of the Virgin Islands Code.”

The question then asks: “Shall this proposal become law?”

The petition was supposed to be on the November 6 General Election ballot, but it failed to appear thereon because of time constraints. It was forwarded to the Legislature on October 1, fourteen days before early voting started. Yet the law requires that the Senate be given 30 days to deliberate the matter. Early voting started and the Senate was still holding Committee of the Whole meetings discussing the petition. St. Croix Retirees Inc. sued the Supervisor of Elections in an attempt to halt the early voting process, as the ballot did not include the petition question. Soon after, however, the St. Croix Retirees Inc. and the Election System of the Virgin Islands came up with an agreement that called for a special election if senators failed to approve the petition.