

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Territory-Wide Vote On Reapportionment Initiative Set For March 30

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Virgin Islanders territory-wide will vote on March 30 on a petition that could potentially transform the Virgin Islands Legislature. Called the Reapportionment Initiative, the new arrangement, if supported by a majority of Virgin Islanders, would imitate 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 Reapportionment Initiative aims to restructure the legislature from two separate legislative districts into 5 separate legislative districts. The legislature would continue to have 15 senators: 9 district senators and 6 at-large senators.

The petition was originally supposed to be on the 2018 General Election ballot, but after collecting much more signatures than required by law, the petition [suddenly faced a new hurdle](#). Because of territory-wide hearings organized by then-Senate President Myron Jackson following the initiative's successful collection of signatures, the petition, which was already short on time to be on the ballot, missed the deadline. According to VI law, after collecting the requisite amount of signatures, the petition must be voted on by the Senate, which could then decide to approve, amend or fail it. However, for the petition not to be placed on the ballot, senators must act on it as presented in the petition.

[In October of last year](#), senators introduced and voted in favor of a bill that called for a special election set for March 30, costing taxpayers \$145,000.

Proponents of the bill calling for the special election explained their support of that measure. Then-Senator Tregenza Roach, now the territory's lieutenant governor, said the decision to change the current makeup of the Legislature should be placed before voters. He said additional education was needed on the potential changes.

Then-Senator Alicia Hansen, who also supported the special election, said it was important to give all Virgin Islanders a chance to be part of the change, so that “no one can say that they didn’t have the opportunity to participate in that decision,” she said, echoing the sentiment of Mr. Roach and other lawmakers who supported the special election bill.

The bill “gives the power to the people to go to the polls and say, ‘this is what I want the makeup of the Legislature to look like,’” then-Senator Janette Millin Young said.

Senator Dwayne DeGraff said it should be noted that both the majority and minority caucuses were in support of the special election measure.

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?”