

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Leaders Of Reapportionment Initiative Continue To Express Concern About March 30 Vote

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Members of the St. Croix Government Retirees, Inc., (SCGR), the organization leading the reapportionment effort for which a territorial vote is scheduled for March 30, continue to express concerns to the Virgin Islands Board of Elections that participation for the upcoming vote is being compromised because of actions being taken by the board.

That's according to the latest letter written by Mary Moorhead, SCGR's special coordinator, and addressed to Board of Elections Chairman Raymond Williams, which pinpointed certain decisions the board has made that SCGR believes is harmful to the upcoming vote.

See the full letter below:

"Dear Mr. Williams:

"This is a follow-up to the letter from SCGR President Debra Christopher.

"There are more occurrences highlighting our concern for the operation of the Special election. Another facility for voting has been changed from originally announced. The facility assigned for the voters in the western part of St. Croix is not available. Two facilities, Canegata building and Claude O'Markoe School being unavailable for March 30, 2019 support our position that proper preparation for the Special Election was lacking. The date for the Special election was announced on October 30, 2018.

"As SCGR Special Project Coordinator for the Initiative, I asked Supervisor of Elections to send a notice "Special Election March 30, 2019" to the list of registered voters who submitted Absentee applications for the November 2018 General election. While the list may change, the notice would let potential absentee voters know of a pending election, particularly mainland college students. It is highly probable that registered voters outside of the Territory do not know there's a Special election scheduled for March 30, 2019. A notice of the Special election would alert the registered voter to research the matter. The request being denied, I visited the directors of housing complexes for the elderly to inform them of the availability of Absentee applications and of early voting dates for their residents. The Election System policy limits a person to one set of Absentee applications, therefore I was not able to take the applications to the complexes. The directors agreed to assist the registered voters residing in their complex.

"This Special election does not involve candidates. As proponents of the initiative, SCGR expected to receive whatever information/list is usually provided to candidates to facilitate their campaign. Acknowledged, this is the first Initiative to get to an election, but SCGR is disappointed with the lackadaisical manner of the Election System. Based on the uniqueness of initiative and the specifics of the Revised Organic Act that has been ignored by the Election System, the scheduling and process approved for March 30, Special election is seriously troubling."

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 new system 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 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.