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Senate President Calls For Federal Investigation After Mail is Sent to Legislature Smearing All Senators Except Steven Payne

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The Earl B. Ottley Legislature in St. Thomas in 2015. By. ERNICE GILBERT/V.I. CONSORTIUM

Senate President Donna Frett-Gregory is calling for a federal investigation after a letter was sent to the Legislature through the U.S. Postal Service defaming all but one senator: Steven Payne.

The letter, which Ms. Frett-Gregory described as threatening and a form of intimidation — hence the call for a federal investigation — blasts all 14 lawmakers and makes baseless, defaming claims about them.

The Consortium received the letter anonymously Tuesday and will not publish its contents.

The letter begins by stating, "In light of the recent allegations pertaining to Senator Payne, only one news outlet has blown the situation and make it a guilty by public outcry. Shame on the legislative body to have taken a stance in all 14 asking for his resignation when in fact the Senator guilty or not has been charged [sic] officially with any crimes." The letter further suggests that the 14 senators resign.

Ms. Frett-Gregory said her office would not take what she described as a threat lightly. "I'm not going to allow correspondence of that nature to intimidate me as a senator and most importantly as the president of the institution in the 34th Legislature," she said. "I'm very concerned about it because it came through the Postal Service and it's threatening and it's an attempt to intimidate senators. So I am not going to take that matter lightly."

She added, "Because we received the correspondence from the Post Office, it becomes a matter of federal concern. I intend to reach out to the proper authorities so this matter could be investigated in earnest."

Senator Kurt Vialet agreed with the Senate president. "I concur with the Senate president, it needs to be investigated," he said while dismissing the allegations.

Senator Janelle Sarauw said the election season has taken a turn for the worse, with a video already making the rounds baselessly accusing the senator of molesting children. "If they felt I did what they accuse me of doing, the statute of limitations does not run out on rape, and they should take a complaint to the VIPD and do their due diligence.

"But if you look at my exit NOPA, I still have a relationship with the former principal, and these accusations are not coming from a student, or a parent or a player. They are coming from the opposition, really and truly.

"Being gay doesn't make me a pedophile. A pedophile is something completely different and it's sad that we've stooped to that level of politics at this time. It's really sad," Ms. Sarauw said.

Senator Novelle Francis also agreed that the matter should be investigated, but he relegated the letter as political tactics not worth his time. "I've been a public servant for over 30 years and these things don't get me emotionally moved," he said. "I've been called every name in the book, I've been accused of all kinds of things so I'm used to those types of things and I don't allow them to impact my wellbeing or consume me. I'm very focused-forward, and I don't get discouraged by what people say or those types of things. I've grown a thick skin and a broad back and I remain professional."

The letter, received by the Postal Service on June 1, appears to have arrived at the Legislature on Monday. It was addressed to the Senate president from "Virgin Islands Concerned Citizens", and includes smearing remarks against all 34th Legislature lawmakers except Mr. Payne.

It starts with smearing remarks against Ms. Frett-Gregory, then moves on to Mr. Francis, Genevieve Whitaker, Marvin Blyden, Alma Heyliger Francis, Dwayne DeGraffe, Milton Potter, Carla Joseph, Ms. Sarauw, Kenneth Gittens, Samuel Carrion, Mr. Vialet, and Javan James.

The fourteen lawmakers listed in the letter [have all called for Mr. Payne to resign](#) following allegations of either sexual harassment or sexual assault made against him by three women, among them a young female employee of his office.

