

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Former Senator Steven Payne Sr. Takes Battle to Court

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Former Senator-At-Large Steven Payne Sr. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

Former Senator Steven Payne Sr., who served as an at-large senator before being expelled from the 34th Legislature on July 20th has taken to the courts asking that he be reinstated the position of senator, contending in a V.I. Superior Court filing that he was not afforded due process by the 34th Legislature.

Mr. Payne had sought a [temporary restraining order](#) filed by attorney Treston Moore on Monday against the sitting of Senator-At-Large Angel Bolques Jr. But with Mr. Bolques already sworn in, Judge Renee Gumbs-Carty, who is hearing the matter, ruled that portion of the request moot. She did, however, allow a status conference scheduled for 10:00 a.m. today to move forward.

The complaint names Senate President Donna Frett-Gregory and members of the 34th Legislature as defendants, and Mr. Payne along with Noellise Powell, a St. John resident who voted for Mr. Payne as plaintiffs.

The former senator says the employee in his office [who accused him of sexual harassment](#) was lying, and he made an impassioned plea during the July 20th Senate session before being expelled. Mr. Payne has also attempted to relegate as liars [Steffi Emilien](#) and [Chezni Jones](#), the two other women who came forward detailing alleged events of sexual assault.

The former senator is seeking to be elected in the 35th Legislature and will face off with Mr. Bolques in the Democratic Primary election scheduled for August 6. If Mr. Payne is successful in the Democratic Primary, he would face senator-at-large candidate Sherry-Ann Francis in the general election, scheduled for Nov. 8. If he wins in the general election, Mr. Payne would become a member of the 35th Legislature.

As it currently stands, Mr. Bolques will continue to serve out the remainder of the Senate term. During his swearing-in ceremony on Monday, Mr. Bolques promised to, in his service, uphold the dignity and integrity of the Legislature. "I know that the turn of events has been very difficult," Mr. Bolques said. Calling his appointment a "blessing," he asked the people of the Virgin Islands to monitor and evaluate his performance in the position over the coming months, and use the information gleaned to make a good decision when it is time to vote on the At-Large senatorial seat for the upcoming 35th legislature, which Mr. Bolques hopes to capture.

The expulsion Mr. Payne follows exclusive reporting from the V.I. Consortium which prompted the Senate to launch an investigation after a staffer in Mr. Payne's office accused him of sexual harassment.

The former senator was already being investigated by the Senate Committee on Ethical Conduct when the Consortium reported on two other incidents of alleged sexual harassment and assault. Although the Ethics Committee recommended a term of suspension for Mr. Payne, an amendment to the censure motion co-sponsored by several senators called for his expulsion instead. That motion was ultimately approved by every senator except Payne.

Mr. Payne hasn't been responding to requests for comment from Consortium journalists.