

Dr. Cleopatra Peter's Testimony as a Concern Citizen

As a resident, I want to advocate for several vital priorities: establishing state-of-the-art hospitals on all three islands; developing modern schools equipped with advanced technology for our children; improving agriculture to foster self-sustainability; ensuring cost-effective utility services; and building proper roads that are safe and gentle on our vehicles. My ultimate goal is to help make the Virgin Islands great for all of us.

However, these aspirations remain just dreams if we do not ensure free and fair elections here in the Virgin Islands. I am a native Virgin Islander who left for many years and returned in 2018. The first election I participated in was in 2022, and I was shocked to see that votes were not being counted where they were cast. That is a serious problem. Free and fair elections are the foundation of any democracy. When citizens lack confidence in our electoral process, we all suffer. This is why we face issues such as inadequate healthcare, deteriorating schools, declining agriculture, rising utility costs, and infrastructure problems like terrible roads that damage vehicles and cause accidents—leading to loss of income and even loss of lives.

After the November 2022 election, Senator Kurt Viatlet wrote a letter to Delia Smith, the U.S. Attorney, raising ongoing concerns about election integrity. He began his letter by stating, “As you are undoubtedly aware, during the 2012 election cycle, the integrity of the Virgin Islands Election System was clouded by public uncertainty regarding irregularities and missing ballots.” He referenced a report on the 2012 general election, which highlighted the disappearance of approximately 3,000 ballots. Despite the passage of years, doubts about missing ballots and the trustworthiness of our elections persist.

He further analyzed the 2022 election results, pointing out discrepancies. For example, at John F. Kennedy, during early voting, the Bryan/Roach team received 63 votes (52%), but on election day, they only received 54 votes, while the Viatlet/Sarauw team’s votes increased from 58 (48%) to 107 (67%). These inconsistencies suggest that votes are not being accurately counted where they are cast.

This letter from our current senator highlights issues from 2012 and again in 2022. Sadly, little has changed for the better since then. I believe the root of the problem is simple: “Votes need to be counted where they are cast.” It is unacceptable that a sitting senator, aspiring to serve at the highest levels, must write to the U.S. Attorney about election irregularities. When elections are unfair, it damages our pride, emotions, finances, families, and future generations. It hampers our ability to build hospitals, educate our children, and achieve self-sufficiency in agriculture. Unfair elections threaten our democracy and can subtly usher in authoritarian tendencies under the

guise of democracy, which can lead to gentrification and a mass exodus from our territory.

Look at what happened on September 8, 2022, when Supervisor Fawkes testified before this Senate. Senator Carla Joseph was the only one to inquire about the whereabouts of the Chairperson, as the Supervisor proposed amendments that diminished the board's authority. To this day, the Supervisor has not provided documentation showing that she was authorized by the board to represent it. Additionally, the board has 14 members, yet none were present to represent its interests—was that by design? The board continues to face significant issues.

In 2023, the Supervisor testified that 2024 would be the first election she would oversee—a role previously managed by the board. However, Title 18, Section 47 states that the board has jurisdiction over elections. Yet, the Supervisor claims control. This contradiction must be resolved by this Senate by March. The responsibility for fair elections must be clear.

We must work diligently to amend or repeal segments of Act 8690 that diminish the power of the board and ensure that elections are free, fair, and transparent here in the Virgin Islands.

In conclusion, I strongly support Bill 36-0187, “Votes need to be counted where they are cast.” Our children and elders depend on it, and our democracy needs it. With free and fair elections, we will be able to enjoy state-of-the-art hospitals on all three islands, modern schools with advanced technology, sustainable agriculture, cost-effective utility services, and proper roads that are safe and gentle on our vehicles.

Let us work together to make these Virgin Islands great for ALL-A-WE!

Thank you.

Dr. Cleopatra Peter