

## Board of Elections Debate Over Ida Smith Residency Request Revives Questions About Supervisor's Authority

The meeting covered Smith's complaint, a failed motion to withdraw Fawkes's request, questions about disqualification notices, James Weber III's hearing request, Jed JohnHope's signatures and a blocked removal motion.

Politics / **Published On June 04, 2026 06:15 AM /**

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**Delegate to Congress candidate Ida Smith.**

A renewed request for residency information from Ida Smith sparked a contentious debate at Wednesday's V.I. Board of Elections meeting, reviving concerns over a similar 2024 dispute and prompting sharp disagreement over the authority of Supervisor of Elections Caroline Fawkes to

seek additional information from a candidate during the nomination process.

The matter surfaced during the supervisor's report, when board members discussed a June 2, 2026 letter sent to Ms. Smith requesting information regarding the place of residence listed on her nomination papers. Several members questioned whether the request mirrored a previous challenge involving Ms. Smith two years ago, when the matter [escalated to court](#) after Ms. Fawkes sought additional residency-related information.

The dispute deepened Wednesday when Ms. Smith filed a formal complaint with the Board of Elections over the June 2 request. The complaint argues that Ms. Fawkes exceeded her legal role by requiring Ms. Smith to provide residency documentation, creating an additional hurdle for a Delegate to Congress candidate that Ms. Smith says the law does not authorize.

In her complaint, Ms. Smith asked the Board to restrict the supervisor to filing requirements authorized by law, block any adverse action connected to the disputed documentation request, and issue written findings on any corrective steps taken.

Board members also referenced an Attorney General's report from the 2024 dispute. According to the discussion, the report addressed the limits of the supervisor's authority and cited the constitutional qualifications for the office of Delegate to Congress, including age, citizenship and inhabitancy requirements.

One board member read from the report, stating that courts have ruled that states cannot impose additional requirements on prospective members of Congress beyond those provided by the Constitution. The same member argued that Ms. Fawkes was repeating the same process from 2024 and questioned why the issue had resurfaced.

Ms. Fawkes defended the 2026 request, saying it was tied to information submitted as part of the nomination process. She said candidates sign forms acknowledging that nomination papers do not guarantee qualification for candidacy and authorizing the Election System to verify information provided in nomination papers and affidavits.

The supervisor said the current issue involved information listed on Ms. Smith's 2026 nomination documents, including a sworn statement and address information. She argued that the Election System has the authority to seek clarification when information on a candidate's filing appears to require verification.

Ms. Fawkes also referenced the requirement that a voter must have a dwelling, building or apartment, and alluded to a ruling by Judge Robert Molloy in connection with the address issue. She said the request to Ms. Smith was for information related to the address listed on the 2026 documents, not simply a replay of the prior case.

Board members pushed back, arguing that the earlier dispute had already raised questions about whether the supervisor could proceed in that manner. They said the 2024 matter involved Ms. Smith being asked to prove residency on St. John and that the Attorney General's report criticized the process used at the time.

During the discussion, the report was described as stating that if the capacity of a nomination appears doubtful, Title 18 of the Virgin Islands Code provides a process for a public hearing in the election district where the signer in question purports to reside. According to the discussion, the report found that the procedure used in 2024 was inconsistent with the statutory framework and arguably deprived Ms. Smith of an opportunity to be heard.

Harriet Mercer then made a motion to have the supervisor withdraw the request for Ms. Smith to prove residency and halt the renewed inquiry. The motion drew debate over whether the Board should intervene before Ms. Smith had an opportunity to respond within the time provided.

Board Chair Raymond Williams said he did not believe it was proper for the Board to act on the matter at that stage. He said the supervisor had issued the request and that the process should be allowed to play out before the Board considered whether to intervene.

The motion to require withdrawal of the request failed, with three members voted in favor and five voted against, allowing Ms. Fawkes's request to remain in place.

The debate over Ms. Smith's residency inquiry unfolded alongside broader concerns about how candidates were being notified of disqualifications. Board member Atanya Springette raised Title 18, Section 411, which she said requires a candidate whose nomination certificate is found defective to be notified immediately by special messenger and given the reasons for the defect.

Springette said some disqualified candidates told him they did not receive the required notice in that manner and learned of their disqualification through other channels, including the media. She argued that candidates should be personally notified and given the opportunity to address defects within the time allowed by law.

Ms. Fawkes responded that the Election System does not issue press releases on disqualified candidates. She said that when disqualifications occur, deputies contact the individuals, draft letters for her review, and send the letters by email with confirmed receipt. She said any candidates who shared their letters with the media did so on their own.

The discussion also turned to candidate James Weber III, who submitted correspondence requesting a hearing to appeal his disqualification as an aspirant for Delegate to the United States House of Representatives. His letter, read into the record, said he learned of his disqualification by phone when a reporter called him for comment on May 29, 2026 at 2:37 p.m., and that he later received notice of the disqualification by letter at his mailbox.

Mr. Weber asked the Board to allow him a hearing to state his case and appear on the federal election ballot on November 3, 2026.

Board members also discussed disqualified candidate Jed JohnHope, including questions about whether he had been given three days to correct defects in his nomination papers. Ms. Fawkes said Mr. JohnHope did not have the required 100 signatures on his papers and argued that the issue could not be cured where the required number of signatures was not present.

The supervisor also said her office uses controlled nomination petition sheets in specific colors and does not accept uncontrolled white sheets with copied signatures, citing the need to protect the integrity of the filing process.

Another issue raised was whether nomination papers had been filed in the proper district. Ms. Fawkes said the law requires filing with the supervisor in the election district where the candidate resides, while some members questioned how that requirement applies to federal candidates.

The meeting grew increasingly tense as members continued to question Ms. Fawkes's handling of candidate qualification matters. Near the end of the discussion, a motion was made to remove Ms. Fawkes from her position over what was described as numerous violations of law. Mr. Williams ruled the motion out of order.

A vote to uphold the chair's ruling passed 5-4, preventing the motion from moving forward.

The meeting ended with unresolved disputes over the Smith residency inquiry, the handling of disqualification notices, and the role of the Board in supervising or overruling actions taken by the Supervisor of Elections during the candidate qualification process.

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