https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/felony-charges-filed-in-fraud-case-involving-missouri-early-voting-initiative/article_a3ffa3e9-8142-5baa-b248-67ad6d5e08a5.html

Felony charges filed in fraud case involving Missouri early-voting initiative

By MARIE FRENCH Associated Press
May 18, 2015

JEFFERSON CITY • Four people are facing felony charges over fraudulent signatures on a 2014 initiative petition that unsuccessfully sought to put an early-voting proposal on the Missouri ballot, Secretary of State Jason Kander said Monday.

Kander said his office turned its investigative findings over to Boone County law enforcement officials, who filed the recent charges. There were 1,000 questionable signatures flagged in Boone County alone, including those of deceased individuals.

"I have zero tolerance for elections fraud or any kind of fraud," said Kander, a Democrat planning to run for U.S. Senate next year. "It doesn't matter what the subject is or anything like that, what matters is that people don't break the law, follow the process."

The warrants were issued last week, but only one suspect is in custody. Keven Hayes, listed as homeless in the warrant, was arrested in Columbia on three counts of forgery. He doesn't have an attorney listed in court documents, but he is scheduled for a Tuesday court hearing. He is being held on $13,500 bail.

Investigators allege that he submitted petitions with 363 signatures from Boone County, including names of deceased individuals and three people who when contacted said they hadn't signed the petition. Hayes collected signatures on behalf of Buzzard Bay Strategies, which paid bonuses to those collecting the most signatures. The Boston-based company didn't immediately respond to a request for comment Monday from The Associated Press.

Forgery warrants also were issued for Tracy Renee Jones, Danny Lawrence Williams and Rogell Coker Jr., according to court records. None had publicly listed phone numbers in Missouri, and court documents indicate investigators couldn't find current addresses for any of them.

Kander has supported early voting proposals but said he hasn't taken positions on specific initiative petitions.

Kander's office ultimately determined the ballot petition didn't have enough valid signatures. The measure, backed by Democratic-aligned groups, would have created the longest early voting period in the nation.

There were widespread allegations of fraud during the signature gathering process, and Kander's office referred cases to prosecutors last year in Boone, Buchanan, Cooper, Grundy, Knox, Pike and Schuyler counties.

No charges were filed after investigations in Grundy and Buchanan counties. An investigation is ongoing in Pike County, and the other counties didn't immediately return calls from the AP.

Boone County Clerk Wendy Noren said she's pleased charges were filed and that signatures flagged by her office were fully investigated.

"The only way you stop this thing is having active investigations and successful prosecutions of this type of fraud," she said. "I'm glad it was not ignored."

Still, Republican Sen. Will Kraus, who is running for secretary of state in 2016, criticized Kander for not pursuing cases in other counties, pointing to a study paid for by a Republican political consultant that found potential fraud in dozens of counties.



post-dispatch illustration