



AG Nessel Takes Action to Ensure Fair & Free Elections

Contact: Ryan Jarvi 517-599-2746

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LANSING – Attorney General Dana Nessel is not only defending the State against baseless election lawsuits, but has also issued several cease and desist letters to entities and individuals spreading misinformation during the general election. At the same time, a Canton Township man is facing felony charges of voter fraud filed by the Attorney General’s office after he reportedly completed, signed and submitted his daughter’s absentee voter ballot to his local clerk’s office.

“These actions highlight my office’s commitment to pursuing, investigating and charging, when necessary, election fraud,” Nessel said. “Signing someone else’s name to a ballot is a felony under state law, and spreading misinformation to purposefully interfere with our election and ballot-counting processes is criminal behavior that will not be tolerated. Michigan has multiple layers of review throughout our election process that make it very difficult for a bad actor to commit fraud, which is why it so seldom occurs.”

Nessel’s office issued five cease and desist letters to various groups on both sides of the political aisle, including Big League Politics, which had posted misleading and deceptive information online that alleged Detroit poll workers were being trained to commit illegal acts while counting ballots. The video – which had since been flagged as misinformation and removed from YouTube – contained heavily edited audio recording of what was reportedly a poll worker training session taken out of context to convey a fraudulent message.

The Attorney General’s office is continuing investigations into Big League Politics and other entities that were sent cease and desist letters to determine whether laws were broken. Additional information may not be provided until after the investigations are complete.

Meanwhile, Paul Parana, 47, is charged with forging a signature on an absentee ballot, a five-year felony, and impersonating another to vote at an election, a four-year felony. He was arraigned Friday in 35th District Court in Plymouth. His next court appearance is a probable cause conference set for Nov. 20, followed by a preliminary hearing on Nov. 30.

It is alleged Parana forged his daughter's signature on an absentee voter ballot and submitted it to the Canton Township Clerk's Office. The incident was reported to the Michigan Department of State, which is continuing its investigation, and sent to the Attorney General's office for prosecution and further investigation. The illegal ballot was voided prior to the election.

One report of widespread voter fraud emanating from the Upper Peninsula was discovered to be false. The Attorney General's office was made aware of the report by the Marquette Police Department, which investigated one man's claim that he completed and submitted roughly 300 voter ballots that had been sent to his rental properties for past tenants. He posted on Facebook that he voted for those people. The man was contacted by police and denied doing what he said and admitted that the post was only to stir people up. Election officials were contacted and no fraud was substantiated. Charges are not being sought at this time.

In a separate complaint, the Attorney General's investigators determined one report of election fraud from a Detroit resident was nothing more than a poor joke. The Detroit resident posted on Facebook that he worked for Wayne County and threw out thousands of ballots from voters who supported President Trump. He later admitted that his statement was wholly false. Charges are not being sought at this time.

"These are important examples of our commitment to review, investigate and prosecute – if appropriate – any allegation of election fraud," Nessel said. "By working with our partners in law enforcement and government at all levels, we will ensure the integrity of our elections is protected and the results accurately reflect the will of the people."

The recent actions are consistent with those the Attorney General's office has taken in the past to protect the integrity of Michigan's elections, including its **case against Southfield Clerk Sherikia Hawkins**, who is facing six felony charges. Hawkins – while serving as the city's clerk – used a computer to fraudulently alter or modify the Qualified Voter File after the 2018 general election to falsely reflect that previously logged absentee ballots were void due to arriving in envelopes that were not signed by the voter.

Earlier this summer, the Attorney General's office **charged a Plymouth Township woman**, Karen Rotondo, with a felony after she allegedly attempted to obtain an absentee voter ballot in the name of another person in the weeks leading up to the August 2020 primary.

The Attorney General's office has also taken action to stop alleged attempts to suppress the vote by Jack Burkman and Jacob Wohl, who reportedly orchestrated a robocall to Detroit voters in an attempt to deter them from participating in the election through the use of absentee voter ballots. **Burkman and Wohl were recently bound over to Wayne County Circuit Court** on multiple felony election law violations.

The Attorney General's office is also coordinating with the Michigan State Police, the Michigan Department of State and the Muskegon Police Department to investigate possible voter registration irregularities in the city of Muskegon. The Muskegon City Clerk's Office reported irregularities in voter registration forms both mailed and dropped off in-person in late September and October 2020. The investigation, led by MSP, is ongoing.

ELECTION LITIGATION

While there are several other lawsuits filed in Michigan concerning the election, the Attorney General's office continues to defend those filed against State agencies and officials.

"The cases that have been filed thus far provide no evidence to support their claims," Nessel said. "Those who continue to push a false narrative claiming our elections were not conducted in a fair, free and transparent manner, or that there is widespread voter fraud, are only trying to erode public confidence in our election system, undermine our democracy and steal the election away from the people of Michigan. The facts simply are not there to support these claims."

The following is a status update of election-related litigation filed against the State or public officials:

- *Trump for President, Inc & Eric Ostergren v Benson*: The Trump campaign filed a lawsuit Nov. 4 in the Michigan Court of Claims stating challengers had a right to be provided video surveillance footage of absent voter ballot drop-boxes, and that absent voter counting boards in the state were being held without inspectors from both parties present. Judge Cynthia Stephens denied the motion Nov. 5 and issued **her written opinion Nov. 6**. The plaintiffs filed an application to appeal with the Michigan Court of Appeals but failed to provide the required documentation and evidence for the appeal. That has not yet been fully supplied to the court, and the case remains pending.
- *Trump for President, Inc, et al v Benson, et al*: The Trump campaign filed this lawsuit Nov. 11 in the U.S. District Court Western District of Michigan, though the campaign's allegations pertain to the eastern part of Michigan. Plaintiffs – which include the Trump campaign, individual voters and Republican challengers – filed the complaint against Benson, Board of State Canvassers, and Wayne County Canvassers, alleging fraud and various irregularities that allegedly occurred at Detroit's absent voter counting board at the TCF Center. Plaintiffs seek to halt Wayne County's canvass and certification of the statewide election results by the state board. The Attorney General's office will respond in court.
- *Bally, et al v Whitmer, et al*: A group of individuals filed a lawsuit late Nov. 11 against Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, the Board of State Canvassers and the boards of county canvassers for Ingham, Wayne and Washtenaw counties. Plaintiffs allege the same fraudulent activity alleged in Detroit as in the other pending cases, but also allege that the vote counts in Washtenaw and Ingham counties should be thrown out. This would result in over 1 million votes being thrown out, though the claims are baseless. The Attorney General's office will respond in court.

Countless claims of voter fraud being circulated have been debunked by the Michigan Department of State. More information on debunked claims can be found **online at the Secretary of State's website**. Misinformation can also be reported by **emailing the Secretary of State's office**.

Anyone with evidence of specific allegations regarding election fraud is encouraged to contact the Attorney General's office at 517-335-7659 so that the claim can be investigated and, if found to be credible, prosecuted under law.

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Please note: A criminal charge is merely an allegation and the defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty. The Attorney General's office does not provide photos of defendants (Parana), but one may be available from the booking agency, the Wayne County Sheriff's Department.



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