

Former political workers sentenced for vote fraud

By **Matthew Walberg, Tribune reporter**

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Two former political workers for Ald. **Bernard Stone**, 50th, were each sentenced to nearly a year in Cook County Jail on Wednesday for attempting to manipulate absentee ballots in Stone's hotly contested 2007 election.

Anish Eapen, a precinct captain and a Streets and Sanitation worker who was Stone's ward superintendent, was convicted in June along with unemployed student Armando Ramos following a bench trial that began late last year.

Prosecutors charged the men with approaching residents in the ward and offering to help them cast absentee ballots, in some cases even filling out ballots for some of the alleged victims.

Both faced multiple felony vote fraud charges, but Circuit Judge Marcus Salone found them guilty of attempted absentee ballot violations, which are misdemeanors.

At Wednesday's sentencing hearing, Salone rejected the pleas of attorneys representing Eapen and Ramos for sentences that did not include jail time, saying that "the reality is that they attempted to steal democracy."

Eapen, 40, was sentenced to 364 days in jail, and Ramos, 36, was sentenced to 270 days.

Reached for comment Wednesday, Stone called the case "a witch hunt" and said Eapen and Ramos are "political prisoners."

"They were convicted of misdemeanors — misdemeanors that are no longer crimes," said Stone. "Not felonies, misdemeanors, like spitting on the sidewalk."

Tribune reporter Hal Dardick contributed to this report.

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