

Waukegan couple from Iran plead not guilty to voter fraud

By **Ruth Fuller and Duaa Eldeib, Chicago Tribune**

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A **Waukegan** couple who are Iranian immigrants could face up to five years in prison and deportation if found guilty of falsifying documents on voter applications.

Mahmoud Vakili, 67, and his wife Parvin Vakili, 62, pleaded not guilty in Lake County on Wednesday to charges of perjury of the election code and mutilation of election material. They were charged in early November, officials said.

During Wednesday's hearing, Judge John Phillips asked the couple if they were U.S. citizens, to which each responded: "No, sir, I am not." Both said they were born in Iran.

According to the Lake County Clerk's office, Mahmoud Vakili first registered to vote in Lake County in 1988 and his wife in 1992.

Since then, Mahmoud Vakili has voted five times and Parvin Vakili seven times, Clerk Willard Helander said. They most recently voted in 2010.

"They were very conscientious general-election voters," Helander said.

Law enforcement officials were tipped off after the Vakilis' son requested a letter from the clerk's office to confirm his own voter registration status, Helander said.

As part of the citizenship process, if someone admits to or is suspected of having registered to vote without being a U.S. citizen, that person is required to submit a letter certifying his or her voter registration status, a spokesman for the U.S. Citizenship and **Immigration** Services said. Foreign nationals are forbidden by law to vote in national or state elections.

The clerk's office is required to process any voter registration applications that it receives but does not have tools available by which to confirm someone's citizenship before accepting a voter registration application, Helander said.

"It's a process that is very much an honor system," she said.

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If the Vakilis are convicted, the couple could face deportation, a matter that would "be addressed by the Department of Homeland Security," the judge said.

Both of the Vakilis were released from jail on \$5,000 bonds. Neither Mahmoud nor Parvin Vakili has a criminal history in Lake County, according to court documents. The Vakilis could not be reached after the hearing for further comment.

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