

One pleads guilty in felon voter investigation

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JEFF REINITZ

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WATERLOO | One of eight people who were charged with illegally voting has pleaded guilty.

Anthony Mario Greer, 25, of Waterloo, pleaded guilty to a single count of first-degree election misconduct in Black Hawk County District Court on Thursday.

He was sentenced to up to five years in prison on the voting charge, which will run concurrent with prison time for a probation violation in connection with a 2010 drug charge. A \$750 fine was suspended.

Authorities said Greer voted in the November 2012 election in Black Hawk County while he was still on probation for a felony charge. Iowa law prohibits felons from voting unless they have had their rights restored by the governor.

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Greer was one of nine people who charged in February with breaking voting laws following an Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation probe. Eight were from the Waterloo area and were accused of voting while still on probation or parole. Their trials are tentatively scheduled for April.

As many as 20 others with felony records were investigated for voting in Black Hawk County without having their rights restored. But they weren't charged because they were off parole and probation at the time of the election, said Michael Blackwell, a University of Northern Iowa professor.

He and members of NAACP and Social Action Inc. met with County Attorney Thomas Ferguson in February in an attempt to get him to drop charges against the eight charged with voting.

Blackwell said he doesn't believe the charged voters intended to break the law but were likely confused by changes in policy. Former governor Tom Vilsack had eased restrictions, automatically restoring voting rights after felons completed their sentences and discharged probation or parole. That policy was reversed when Gov. Terry Branstad took office. He required an application process.

“We thought the matter of intention was important, that they didn’t choose to vote for the government,” Blackwell said. He believes the eight had been told by friends or others they could vote.

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“I think people were confused. They thought they could vote,” he said.

Because they registered on election day, officials weren’t able to determine their eligibility on the spot, Blackwell said.

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