

JERSEY MAYHEM

## Ex-Asbury Park school board member's voter fraud charges dropped

**Austin Bogues** Asbury Park Press

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ASBURY PARK - After being charged with fraud, Felicia Simmons came up short in her bid for re-election to the board of education this past spring.

But now, after the Union County Prosecutor's Office dropped the charges last month, she's looking to start her next chapter.

"When everything got dismissed, I was relieved but I was tired ... exhausted," Simmons said, in a phone interview with the Press.

"It put me through a lot financially, spiritually, it was a lot. I think it was just unneeded," she said, referring to the case.

Simmons helped lead a voter registration drive in the November 2015 Elizabeth Board of Education race.

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In April 2016, the Union County Prosecutor's Office said a complaint to the county clerk led to Simmons and Melvin Howell, of Elizabeth, being charged with third-degree vote-by-mail fraud.

The Prosecutor's Office said at the time Howell filled out applications for voters who "didn't exist" and said Simmons "falsely claimed to have assisted an ineligible voter."

Howell pleaded guilty this past Feb. 3, to fourth-degree forgery and was sentenced to one-year probation.

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Mark Spivey, a spokesman for the Union County Prosecutor's Office confirmed the charge against Simmons had been dismissed but declined to comment further. The charges were

dropped via a joint request from the prosecutor's office and Simmons' attorney.

Simmons' attorney said she never did anything improper during the registration drive. She served on the Asbury Park school board from 2012 to 2017, and has been active in a number of community organizations. You can see her talk about the racial climate in America in the 2014 video posted above this story.

"Essentially the situation was Ms. Simmons wanted to do a voter drive, she thought the people of Elizabeth deserved it," said her attorney, Kharia Moore, of Newark.

"One of the persons that wanted to help her, we don't know why he decided to just start making up names, it was completely ridiculous," Moore said. "He pretty much did something that didn't make sense."

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