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Ex-sheriff candidate sentenced to probation for forged petitions

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And as a candidate for the county's top law enforcement position at the time, Gumbarevic should have known better, prosecutors said after the suspended county correction officer was sentenced Tuesday to five years of probation and 150 hours of community service.

"This is a person who wanted to run the county sheriff's department, so the fact that she tried to gain that position by some sort of trickery and deceit is unconscionable," Assistant District Attorney Bernard Hyman said after the proceeding.

Gumbarevic, 38, of Oriskany, pleaded guilty in Oneida County Court in March to a single felony count of second-degree criminal possession of a forged instrument.

Gumbarevic was never accused of actually forging the questionable signatures on several petitions in order to get on the ballot during last year's primary race against then-New York Mills Mayor Robert Maciol. Maciol defeated Gumbarevic in the primary and was later elected the county's current sheriff.

Gumbarevic, however, did acknowledge at the time of her plea that she was aware that some of the signatures had been forged on the petitions that were later submitted to the Oneida County Board of Elections.

“The voting process is something we need to have confidence in to make sure that the people who are elected are the people who we voted for,” Hyman said. “If someone manages to get on the ballot by means other than that, our whole political process is undermined, the entire voting process loses credibility and, frankly, it becomes less effective.”

Gumbarevic and her attorney, Robert Julian, declined to make any comments during the proceeding, and Judge Barry M. Donalty offered no final word on the case other than to tell Gumbarevic “good luck” as she left the courtroom.

Gumbarevic’s co-defendant, former correction officer Heidi Bessette, currently faces more than a dozen similar charges accusing her of also possessing forged petitions and then submitting them on Gumbarevic’s behalf to the county Board of Elections in July 2010.

Bessette is due in court next Tuesday to report whether she wants to plead guilty or take her case to trial.