



## Confirmed cases of election fraud in NC



By [Ann McAdams](#) | December 28, 2016 at 4:59 PM EST - Updated August 13 at 3:40 AM

SOUTHEASTERN NORTH CAROLINA (WECT) - From President-elect Donald Trump, to outgoing North Carolina Governor Pat McCrory, to local candidates like Bladen County Soil and Water Conservation Supervisor McCrae Dowless, we've heard plenty of claims from elected officials about voter fraud during the recent election.

But how often are voter fraud cases actually brought before the North Carolina State Board of Elections for review, and how many of those cases are validated and prosecuted?

### Reports of Election Fraud in North Carolina

From the beginning of 2015 until now, the State Board of Elections Investigations Division has investigated more than 435 complaints and referrals from County Boards of Elections and the public at large.

These complaints range from allegations of campaign finance problems to voter registration and voting irregularities. They also included criminal investigations associated with absentee ballot fraud, double voting, vote buying and voting by non-citizens and convicted felons.

The Investigations Division must also manage the physical and cybersecurity of the State and County Boards of Elections.

"Completed criminal investigations are referred to district attorney's offices or other appropriate law enforcement and prosecutorial authorities if there is substantiated evidence of criminal activity and criminal intent. They are prosecuted or declined for prosecution at the discretion of those authorities," State Board of Elections Spokesman Patrick Gannon explained.

Of the approximately 270 matters investigated in 2015, 43 matters were referred to district attorneys across the state. They involved various allegations of voter fraud and vote buying. Local authorities declined to prosecute more than half of the cases where elections investigators found evidence to support criminal activity.

The 18 remaining cases are currently in prosecution status, have resulted in convictions or are under review by district attorney's offices.

Out of approximately 165 matters investigated in 2016, 12 were referred for prosecution, out of which 2 are in prosecution, 5 are under review, and 5 have been declined. 26 cases are still under investigation, but are expected to be referred for prosecution.

Complaints received during the November election are under current review by investigators.

"During the recent election, investigators handled dozens of complaints, including locating and interviewing persons responsible for false reports of voter fraud posted on social media," Gannon said. "The NCSBE takes all reports of voting and campaign irregularities seriously and encourages the public to report suspected improprieties to the Investigations Division."

Joan Fleming, a 26-year veteran of the FBI, supervises the Investigations Division. The division is staffed by investigators with professional law enforcement experience.

## **Specific Cases**

Out of the dozens of validated cases of fraud across the state, the only ones impacting the WECT viewing area are the recent cases of elections fraud reported in Bladen County.

One of those cases, involving allegations of aggressive and improper behavior by Get Out the Vote workers for multiple candidates and at least one political action committee, continues to be reviewed by elections investigators and will be referred to the US Attorney in Raleigh.

However, there are several other examples of recent election fraud cases in surrounding counties.

Jason Wilton Wetzel was charged with felony voter fraud in Cumberland County after the State Board of Elections says he admitted to voting in North Carolina and another state in 2014. According to the Cumberland County District Attorney's office, that case was dismissed pursuant to a plea deal and a deferred prosecution agreement.

In 2015, also in Cumberland County, Samuel Walter Sylvester pleaded guilty to voting as a convicted felon. The DA's office says Sylvester received a prayer for judgment in exchange for pleading guilty to voter fraud. According to State Board of Elections records, Sylvester received 6 months probation and 48 hours of community service.

But other cases fall apart without any significant repercussions.

In Robeson County, allegations were made in 2015 that candidate Theresa Locklear offered meals in exchange for votes. The State Board of Elections says Locklear provided a notarized sworn statement denying that she knew about free meals being offered, and the case was closed due to a lack of evidence.

In October 2016, State Board investigators learned about a Facebook post from Robert Dougherty of Onslow County. In the post, Dougherty allegedly claimed to have voted for family members and friends during the early voting period.

"The SBE located and interviewed Dougherty and determined his claim was a hoax. There was no evidence in voting records that he cast ballots for others, and the case was closed," Gannon said.

### **"Not a high Priority"**

These are the cases of voter fraud and allegations that we know about. There are likely other cases that are never detected or reported.

While voter fraud does not appear to be rampant, members of the State Board of Elections have lamented that it is difficult to get prosecutors to aggressively pursue the cases they do find.

"Sadly, voter fraud is not a high priority for the DA's office, state or federal," State Board of Elections Secretary Rhonda Amoroso said to her fellow board members earlier this month, after evidence was presented about suspiciously similar handwriting for a write-in candidate on over 150 Bladen County absentee ballots. "I don't ever see anything being referred over to the DA for this type of event here, irregularities, fraudulent activity. It's obviously out there because we keep coming back here and having similar issues about it."

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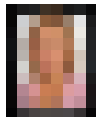
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