



## Man in vote fraud case sentenced to 54 months

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DEFIANCE - The man who grabbed national attention last fall for filling out false voter registrations in exchange for crack cocaine was sentenced yesterday in Defiance County Common Pleas Court to more than four years in prison.

Chad Staton, 22, of Defiance, who pleaded guilty Feb. 17, was sentenced to 54 months for filing false registrations.

He was sentenced by Judge Joseph Schmenk to nine months each for six counts of the fifth-degree felony, to be served consecutively, according to court personnel.

Because he was convicted of a fifth-degree felony, Staton will not be eligible for parole at any point before his 54 months have passed.

For the final four counts, Staton received a sentence of six months each, to be served concurrently. He will receive credit for 10 days he has already served.

He did not receive a fine, but will have to pay court costs and was ordered to reimburse Defiance County for his court-appointed attorney's fees.

Staton's offenses each could have resulted in a fine of \$2,500 and/or imprisonment for up to 12 months.

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Based on his offenses, Staton could be eligible for judicial release in as soon as 30 days after he is delivered to prison, a spokesman

Judicial release is similar to probation, but the decision to release the inmate is made by a judge rather than the prison system. Staton's attorney would have to file a motion in the common pleas court, which Judge Schmenk would either deny, or grant a hearing to consider.

The soft-spoken, slender Staton, who was formerly of Toledo, filled out the 10 forms, plus more than 90 others, in late September. The registrations hit the headlines in October, weeks before the presidential election.

In December, a grand jury returned indictments against him for filing forms in the names of Mary Poppins, Michael Jackson, Janet Jackson, Michael Jordan, Dick Tracy, Jeffrey Dahmer, Brett Favre, George Foreman, Maria Lopez, and George Lopez.

In a strange twist, the woman to whom he gave the forms in exchange for crack, Georgianne Pitts, 41, of Toledo, died in early December. The Lucas County coroner's office ruled the cause of her death as an accidental overdose of a prescription medication.

Toledo police searched Ms. Pitts' home in October and found drug paraphernalia and more voter registration forms. They said she admitted to paying Staton in crack cocaine in lieu of cash.

Officers charged her with misdemeanor possession of drug paraphernalia and possession of marijuana. No charges were filed against her in Defiance.

Ms. Pitts, working on behalf of the NAACP National Voter Fund, submitted the forms to the voter fund, which in turn submitted them to the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections.

Because the addresses on the forms were for the Defiance area, the Cuyahoga County elections board sent the registration forms to Defiance County's elections board, with a note to check the signatures for fraud.



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