

Elizabeth Forward school board member charged with voting illegally

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By Suzanne Elliott

A member of the Elizabeth Forward school board who was accused this month of voting illegally in Westmoreland County will have a hearing Sept. 27 before District Judge Wayne Gongaware in North Huntingdon.

Richard Cummings Jr., who lives in Elizabeth Township, has been charged by Westmoreland County detectives with five counts of unlawful voting and one count of unsworn falsification for claiming he was a resident of North Huntingdon when voting in 2010, 2012 and 2016, according to a complaint filed with Judge Gongaware's office.

Mr. Cummings could not be reached for comment.

He was appointed to the school board seat in January. In the May primary, he ran as both a Democrat and Republican for a four-year term on the board, and he will be on the ballot in the November general election as a Republican.

His fellow board members have nothing but praise for their colleague.

"I did not know Mr. Cummings before he joined the board," board member Ryan Hemminger wrote in an email. "I have had the privilege to get to know him over the past several months and have found him to be a man of good character. He is a professional and has a wonderful family to which he is devoted. He also cares deeply about the Elizabeth Forward School District and the betterment of his community. He has served the District well and with integrity since joining the Board."

Mr. Hemminger said he was not aware of the illegal voting charges until recently.

"The situation does not change my view of Mr. Cummings in any way," Mr. Hemminger said. "This situation does not impact Mr. Cummings' service to the District and no resident of the District has been harmed in any way."

Thomas Sharkey, board vice president, agreed with Mr. Hemminger.

"This is not going to affect anything," Mr. Sharkey said. "He is a stand-up guy."

Both board members said they would not support any action to remove Mr. Cummings from the board.

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