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## Local woman pleads guilty to voter fraud

By EVAN GOODENOW | The Winchester Star  
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Cassandra Amber Marie Ritter

WINCHESTER — A Frederick County woman has admitted to the extremely rare case of in-person voter fraud.

In a plea bargain Monday in Frederick County Circuit Court, Cassandra Amber Marie Ritter pleaded guilty to voting after being convicted of a felony.

Ritter, 33, of the 400 block of McDonald Road near Round Hill in Frederick County, received a two-year suspended sentence. She faced up to five years imprisonment.

On Oct. 20, Ritter, then known as Cassandra Amber Marie Simpson, was convicted in Winchester Circuit Court of heroin distribution after an earlier guilty plea. A little more than two weeks later, Ritter voted at the Round Hill Fire Department, according to Ross Spicer, Frederick County commonwealth's attorney.

Spicer said Rick Miller, the county's general registrar of voters, then notified his office. Spicer said an investigator interviewed Ritter, who confessed.

"She admitted she voted, knew she was a felon and knew she was not allowed to vote," Spicer told Judge N. Randolph Bryant.

Republicans have repeatedly raised claims of voter fraud in recent years in support of voter I.D. laws, which passed in Virginia in 2014, and strict voter roll purges. The Supreme Court on Monday sided with Ohio's Republican Secretary of State Jon Husted in upholding a strict voter purge rule.

But the in-person voter fraud committed by Ritter is actually extremely rare, according to numerous studies. For example, a study by the Brennan Center for Justice found 45 incidents of in-person voter fraud nationally in more than 1.3 billion ballots cast between 2000-2014. And Ritter's case was the only one Miller reported among the 24,436 people who voted in Frederick County in the November election, representing about 0.004 percent of votes cast.

Bryant told Ritter — whose sentence included two years of supervised probation — that she can apply to Gov. Ralph Northam to have her voting rights restored.

"Make sure you dot the 'i's and cross the 't's before you vote again," he said.

— Contact Evan Goodenow at [egoodenow@winchesterstar.com](mailto:egoodenow@winchesterstar.com)