LOCAL NEWS

3 arrested for voter fraud in Orange County believed their voting rights had been restored

Gov. Ron DeSantis announced 20 who served prison time arrested for casting votes

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Supporters of restoring Florida felons' voting rights march to an early voting precinct, Saturday, Oct. 24, 2020, in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. The Florida Rights Restoration Coalition led marches to the polls in dozens of Florida counties. (AP Photo/Marta Lavandier) (Marta Lavandier, Copyright 2020 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.)

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Gov. Ron DeSantis, R-Fla., **announced the charges against 20 Florida residents on Thursday**.

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He claimed they had been convicted of violent felonies in the past, such as murder and sexual assault, and they did not have the right to vote restored under Amendment 4.

Florida voters passed **Amendment 4 in 2018**, which granted voting rights to people who had been convicted of felony crimes. Later legislation whittled that down, prohibiting those who had been convicted of violent crimes while requiring the rest to pay all court fees and fines before their voting rights could be restored.

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On Wednesday, three Orange County residents were arrested and charged with false affirmation and voting as an unqualified elector.

Both charges are third-degree felonies.

Jerry Foster, 72, of Orlando, served prison time for sexual battery on a child in 2009.

According to his arrest report on Wednesday, Foster told investigators he registered to vote in September of 2020.

"Foster heard on the news in 2020 that Gov. DeSantis 'blessed' all convicted felons the right to vote except for convicted murderers and sexual offenders," the report reads. "Foster called the Orange County Sheriff's Office resident deputy assigned to sexual offenders and inquired about voting and the deputy reportedly told him that he could vote."

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Michelle Stribling, 52, of Eatonville, served prison time for second-degree murder.

According to her arrest report on Wednesday, Stribling told investigators she could not read or write very well and did not understand the question on the voter registration application.

"Stribling asked a representative that offered the voter registration applications for assistance with completing the application and the individual would not assist her," the report read.

She said she checked the statement that indicated she was not a convicted felon.

Peter Washington, 59, or Orlando, served 10 years in prison for attempted sexual battery.

He said he attended assimilation classes as he approached his release date, where he was told by an unknown probation officer that his civil rights would be automatically restored upon his release.

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Nine years passed before Washington registered to vote in Orange County after he received an application in the mail from the Orange County Supervisor of Elections.

According to his arrest report, he received a voter registration card, and he also reported for jury duty three times after receiving summons.

"Washington and his wife went to their precinct polling location and voted during the 2020 general election," the report read. "Washington advised he truly believed his civil rights had been restored."

If convicted, all three face a maximum of five years in prison and a $5,000 fine.

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