TALBOT COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

28712 Glebe Road, Suite 1
Easton, Maryland 21601

Office
410-822-1020

Joseph J. Gamble
Sheriff

Fax
410-770-8110

October 1, 2024

Tammy Stafford, Director of The Talbot County Board of Elections
Appointed Members of the Talbot County Board of Elections
215 Bay Street
Easton, MD 21601

Dear Talbot County Board of Elections Staff and Appointed Members,

I have received more than twenty-five citizen complaints and concerns of feelings of disenfranchisement regarding the upcoming election from Talbot County citizens. Specifically, I have received complaints regarding the uneven representation of Democratic (62) and Republican (50) Election Judges by citizens who have applied to become an election judge. Complaints received highlight a clear disparity among one party over another and in this current instance, registered Republican voters are not being equally represented. Further, it has been brought to my attention that is violation of Maryland Election Laws 10-201 and 10-202.

As you know, my office will be conducting security checks of the polling places and escorting ballots to your office to ensure we have a safe and fair election. I strongly urge you to comply with Maryland law. Talbot county citizens and election workers, need to feel safe and secure that the law is being followed. Anything short of compliance can lead to frustration from those who feel disenfranchised. This could easily be mitigated to prevent any possible security and safety related issues.

I have a duty to protect the rights of all Talbot County residents. Please advise if you intend to correct the current representation in Election Judges and the timeframe in which you plan to do so.

Respectfully,

Sheriff Joseph Gamble

Encl: Star Democrat Article September 27, 2024

Cc: Chuck Callahan, Talbot County Council
Keasha Haythe, Talbot County Council
Pete Lesher, Talbot County Council
Lynn Mielke, Talbot County Council
Dave Stepp, Talbot County Council
Joseph Coale, Talbot County States Attorney
Susan J. MacKinnon, Talbot Board of Elections
Gugy Irving III, Talbot Board of Elections
Barbara H. Perry, Talbot Board of Elections
Denise Lovelady, Talbot Board of Elections
Walter W. Black, Talbot Board of Elections
Jared DeMarinis, Maryland State Administrator of Elections
Michael G. Summers, Maryland State Board of Elections
Jim Shalleck, Maryland State Board of Elections
Victoria Jackson-Stanley, Maryland State Board of Elections
Diane Butler, Maryland State Board of Elections
Yaakov "Jake" Weissmann, Maryland State Board of Elections

https://www.stardem.com/news/local_news/election-judge-imbalance-stirs-concerns-in-talbot-county/article_6eb07440-7b6a-11ef-be46-37e24bafffd2.html

CENTERPIECE

Election judge imbalance stirs concerns in Talbot County

KONNER METZ kmetz@chespub.com
Sep 26, 2024

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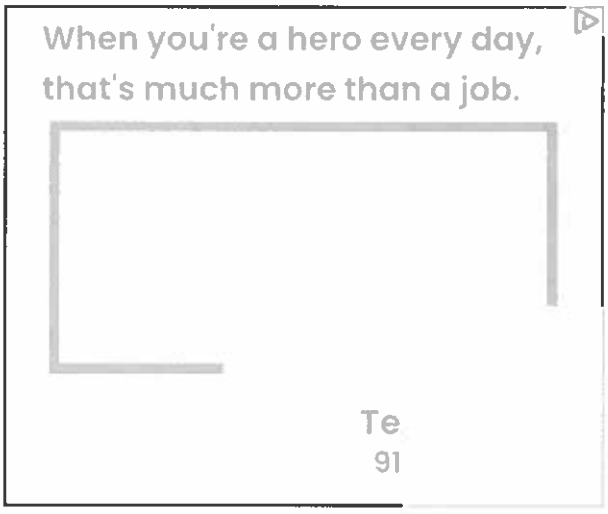
Council Member Dave Stepp called on the council to write a letter to the Talbot County Board of Elections regar motion to send that letter failed in a 3-2 vote.

KONNER METZ/STAR DEMOCRAT

EASTON — Concerns over election judge appointments made by the Talbot County Board of Elections are being raised by residents and local officials.

Adding an unexpected agenda item to the Talbot County Council's Tuesday meeting, Council Member Dave Stepp voiced such concerns, which deal with the party makeup of Talbot County's election judges for the November election. He said the elections board is not following a state law that requires an equal number of election judges from the two political parties.

"I feel like there's certain aspects of election law that are trying to be skirted here, from both an elections director from Talbot County as well as the majority of members of our Talbot County elections board," Stepp said.



According to Election Director Tammy Stafford, current judges consist of 62 Democrats, 50 Republicans and 11 unaffiliated, though that makeup is "fluid" and will change up until Election Day. Currently, she says there are no vacancies.

The 123 election judges, people who are responsible for running polling places and verifying voters, will work at 10 different polling places in the county.

Maryland election code states "each polling place shall have an equal number of election judges" from "the majority party" and "the principal minority party."

Stafford told the Star Democrat that election judge selection is "based on recruitment numbers," which has been a challenge for the county and something the board is "committed" to fixing. "Even if we use everyone on our list, it would be hard pressed to be 50-50," Stafford said.

"Our recruitment levels are still low, and the interest of certain parties is low," Stafford added. She said the board's goal is to "be as party balanced as possible."

Richard Osborne, chair of the Talbot County Republican Central Committee, says he's heard from many Republicans over the past two years that they had applied to be an election judge but were never selected.

This year, the central committee began to document those who were not accepted, Osborne said.

"We have a backlog of almost 30 Republicans who have applied to be an election judge over the last three to four months," Osborne said. "They have not been able to do any of the training. They have been turned down."

Stafford said since canvassing of mail-in ballots begins on Oct. 15, the county's elections board "will not have space for training" or the resources to train individuals who have applied to be judges but have not been accepted yet.



"We have a window of time when we train individuals," Stafford said. Those that have applied will be "one of the first groups of people that we contact for 2026," she said.

Other factors, such as prior experience, play a role. Stafford said the board is also "looking to diversify the age of the election judges throughout the county."

The five members of the Board of Elections are appointed by the governor to four-year terms, with approval from the House of Delegates. The election director is appointed by the county board.

Osborne said the issue boils down to the state code not being followed.

"It's just incredible to me that you have state employees and people that have been appointed to the state board knowingly agree to break the law," Osborne said. "Our committee is not done with fighting this battle."

COUNCIL DEBATE Tuesday's County Council meeting came after a special meeting held Tuesday morning by the Board of Elections to discuss election judges. Stepp and Council President Chuck Callahan attended that morning meeting and brought forth their worries to council members, leading to tense discussion.



Council Member Lynn Mielke said there needed to be additional information and "more of an investigation" into the Talbot County Board of Elections' selection of election judges before the council took any official action.

KONNER METZ/STAR DEMOCRAT

In an agenda item added at the start of the council meeting, Stepp asked the council to send a letter reminding Stafford and the elections board to follow state law, garnering support from Callahan.

The council's three other members, who did not attend the elections board's special meeting that morning, were not immediately willing to send a letter to the election director.

"I understand your concern," Council Vice President Pete Lesher said to Stepp. "That's a serious allegation. But I'm not sure that I could substitute my lower level of expertise here for the judgment and command of the data that the Board of Elections has to take action."



Council Member Keasha Haythe said, "I cannot sign onto a letter that I haven't received any type of information regarding this going on or any constituent complaint," adding that council members typically have a draft of the letter to view prior to signing it.

Stepp said he's heard of citizen complaints and was aware of the Republican Central Committee's efforts to provide judge applications to ensure an even distribution between the two parties.

"I believe it's very timely that we do this because if we miss the opportunity today, I feel like it's going to be a totally missed opportunity," Stepp said of sending the letter.

"Witnessing what was going on this morning was concerning," Callahan said. "There's one thing us five don't want to do, is meddle into an election. That's not what we're here for."

"I think that's what you're doing," Mielke said to Callahan.

"With all due respect to the two councilmen, I think it's sort of based on hearsay and interpretation (of) what they saw," Mielke later stated, saying she didn't have enough information to sign the letter. "And you're tainting the public's view of this election."

"So we just don't bring it up at all then?" Callahan responded. Mielke followed, "No, we don't bring it up in the letter. We have other options."

Callahan and Stepp voted in favor of sending the letter, while Lesher, Haythe and Mielke all voted no.

After Stepp's motion to send a letter failed, he provided additional comment at the end of Tuesday's meeting, emphasizing that the Board of Elections is not in compliance with Maryland law.

"He's just tainted our elections," Mielke said. As Stepp continued, Mielke asked County Attorney Patrick Thomas, "is this appropriate to make accusations as a comment of council?"

Stepp finished his comment asking the Board of Elections to balance its selection of judges.

"Follow the law, do your job, be transparent and train more Republican election judges immediately, and have them ready to work our general election," Stepp said.