Ashland professor challenges voting rights / Filing claims juvenile inmates at Mohican facility shouldn't be allowed to vote in Ashland County

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A local man has challenged the right of 21 Mohican Juvenile Corrections Facility residents to cast absentee ballots in Ashland County.

A Cincinnati-based advocacy group helped the Mohican Juvenile Facility inmates register to vote as part of a statewide effort to encourage youthful offenders between 18 and 21 years of age to take an interest in their communities.

Juveniles adjudicated of crimes that would be felonies if committed by an adult are eligible to vote even while incarcerated. Adults convicted of felonies cannot vote while serving time.

Ashland resident Michael L. Barrett filed a challenge Oct. 15 with the County Board of Elections questioning the right of the MoJCF residents to vote in the county.

Barrett, an Ashland University criminal justice professor, said the issue was brought to his attention at a recent meeting of the Ashland County Republican Party.

"They don't fit the statutory definition of residents," he said.

Barrett believes the inmates should vote in the counties where they lived before they were committed to Ohio Department of Youth Services.

"It would be my contention that they don't even know they're in Ashland County," Barrett said. "They are going to be voting on levies and tax issues when they don't know anything about the county."

The Ashland County Board of Elections scheduled a public hearing on Barrett's challenge 1 p.m. Friday at the board office.

The Ohio Justice & Policy Center plans to send a representative to the hearing, according to staff attorney Angelina N. Jackson.

Jackson is director of the center's Race and Justice Project.

"We were instructed by the secretary of state to register the youth using the facility's address and register them in the county where the facility is located," she said. "I think it's unfortunate that someone would have a reason for these youths not to vote."

About 300 residents of juvenile corrections facilities in seven counties registered to vote with the help of the Ohio Justice & Policy Center. An in-house voter registration drive also was conducted at a juvenile detention center near Cleveland.

Jackson said she was not aware of challenges in any other county, although a few boards of elections have raised eligibility questions.

"No one we've talked to has expressed an opinion they shouldn't be voting," Jackson said. "They just wanted to make sure they were complying with the law."

The Ohio Justice & Policy Center Web site describes the organization as a nonpartisan, nonprofit public interest law office.
providing legal representation and advocacy for people marginalized by the criminal justice system. The organization's stated mission is to advocate reform to promote rehabilitation, enable ex-offenders to reintegrate into the community and eliminate racial disparities within the criminal justice system.

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