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HEADLINE: Voter registrations examined for fakes

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BODY:

Potentially fraudulent voter registration cards have turned up in at least three Ohio counties, and 500 have been turned over to a prosecutor to determine if a crime has been committed.

Matt Damschroder, director of the Franklin County Board of Elections, said the 500 cards his office referred to County Prosecutor Ron O'Brien Wednesday were collected between March and July by workers for ACORN, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now.

"From my perspective, both ACORN and the public are being defrauded by these apparently illegal voter registration forms," Damschroder said.

Problems include multiple cards in the same handwriting, people being registered to vote at vacant lots and people being registered with a bogus birthdate or address.

Similar problems have surfaced in Cuyahoga and Summit counties.

Election workers in Cuyahoga County are reviewing an unspecified number of cards that appear to be duplicates of those already on file, except for one piece of information such as a birth date or Social Security number.

They cannot tie those cards to any group, Board of Elections spokeswoman Jane Platten said.

She said it will be up to the board to decide whether to hand the cards over to the prosecutor.

In Summit County, Board of Elections Director Bryan Williams said this week he will ask the board to investigate about a dozen potentially bogus registration cards submitted by people believed to have been hired by ACORN.

In Franklin County, Damschroder said that the board has met weekly with the organization since March to try to avoid faked voter registration forms.

Katy Gall, head organizer for Ohio ACORN, said the group had "red-flagged" a number of cards. "As part of our own quality control system, we had been setting aside cards that looked to have obvious problems," she said.

ACORN, which has collected 12,000 cards in Franklin County, pays workers by the hour, not by the signature, Gall said. It has fired a number of workers this year, she said.

Gall said a new election law that requires individuals, not groups, to turn in the cards, makes it more difficult for ACORN to detect fraud. "It really limits our ability to do quality control on voter registration because we don't hand into the board of elections, the circulator does."

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