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Summit to look at voter cards

Registrations turned in by ACORN workers come under scrutiny

By Lisa A. Abraham
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The Summit County Board of Elections is once again the site of possible voter registration card fraud.

Summit is one of three Ohio counties, along with Franklin and Cuyahoga, where questionable voter registration cards have been cropping up.



Williams

The Summit board is to vote at its Aug. 22 meeting on what to do about a dozen or so questionable cards that have been turned in by workers for ACORN, a nonprofit

group that has been registering voters throughout Ohio.

In Franklin County, more than 500 cards have been turned over to the county prosecutor for investigation. Other questionable cards reportedly have cropped up in Cuyahoga County.

Bryan Williams, Summit elections board director, said some of the cards have come in with bad handwriting.

When staffers called to confirm them, several voters have said that they did not fill out a registration card. They did, however, report getting a phone call from ACORN, asking to confirm their date of birth, Social Security number and address, and telling them that they would be getting a card in the mail from the board of elections confirming their registration.

ACORN, which stands for the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, advocates for low- and moderate-income families. Its goal in Ohio this year is to register 138,000 low-income voters; so far, 45,000 have been signed up, said Katy Gall, head organizer for Ohio ACORN.

Gall said her organization has been in contact with Summit County, but was not aware of any problems until the board put the matter on its agenda.

"We're trying to find out what the situation is," she said.

Williams said he will bring the matter to the board's attention at its upcoming meeting, and it will have to decide where to go from there.

ACORN

Group says new law hampers card review

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In Franklin County, Gall said she has been in discussions with board officials for several months over questionable cards.

Matt Damschroder, director of the Franklin County Board of Elections, said his board received 500 voter registration cards from ACORN between March and July that appear to be fraudulent. They've all been turned over to the Franklin County prosecutor.

Damschroder said the cards contained nonexistent addresses, were made out in the same handwriting, and even contained a registration for a dead man.

Gall said her group's goal is to improve its system for registering voters and to fire any employees who resort to illegal tactics. She said ACORN workers are paid by the hour, not the card, to discourage fraud.

Gall said the new restrictions of House Bill 3 have hampered ACORN's self-policing efforts. She said in the past, all registration cards were turned in to the organization, which would verify them before turning them in to local boards of elections. That would enable the group to catch potential problems and alert boards of elections. "Quality control is a big part of our system," she said.

House Bill 3, however, requires that the individuals who registers voters turn in their cards, limiting the ability of the group to catch problems. "It's an unintended consequence of House Bill 3," Gall said. "There's no way for us to red-flag the cards."

In 2004, hundreds of faulty voter registration cards were filed in Summit County in the voter registration push leading up to the presidential election. A state and federal investigation, however, was closed with no one facing charges. Locally, the Summit County Sheriff's Office charged one woman in the voter registration card probe.

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