



Defeated Devers sues Lawrence for new state representative election

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LAWRENCE - Defeated state representative candidate Marcos Devers is suing for a new election, saying the Sept. 16 primary was rigged by his opponent, William Lantigua, City Clerk William Maloney and the city's election coordinator Rafael Tejada.

In a civil suit filed in Lawrence Superior Court, Devers alleges the three conspired to allow illegal voters to register at Tejada's 71-73 Greenwood St. home and cast absentee ballots.

Devers also alleges Lantigua supporters working the polls prevented Devers supporters from voting and that Maloney and Tejada allowed the use of absentee ballots by residents who were able to get to the polls.

"We believe there were serious violations of election laws," said Nicholas Guerrero, a North Andover lawyer who represents Devers.

Lantigua yesterday denied all allegations of election abuse and fraud. He described the suit as foolish, baseless and more evidence that Devers' is a poor loser.

Devers lost the Sept. 16 election to Lantigua by 342 votes. The September primary was Devers' second loss against Lantigua. After a defeat in 2006, Devers asked for a recount, which again revealed Lantigua won.

"I am not at all concerned about this," said Lantigua, who said a new election would only give him another chance to defeat longtime rival Devers. "There's nothing to this. I assure that. But coming from Marcos, nothing surprises me anymore."

When reached yesterday, city attorney Charles Boddy, who represents Maloney and Tejada, had no comment and said he hasn't had time to review the allegations due to Tuesday's national election.

The suit includes affidavits from a variety of local residents including:

Annia Lambert, a Ward C precinct warden who said she received absentee ballots from Tejada's residence from people who no longer live there.

Mery Rivas, of 66 East Haverhill St., who said Lantigua asked her to vote for him by absentee ballot in exchange for a work reference. Appalled, she said she voted for Devers instead. In her affidavit, she also said she heard Lantigua's campaign workers calling people and asking them to vote by absentee ballot.

Modesto Maldonado, of 115 Spruce St., who described himself as a "political strategist" for Devers. He said he was told by a city election worker that "he had never seen so many absentee ballot votes cast in a primary election, especially absentee ballots that were voted over the counter. ... I concluded that Mr. Lantigua had

implemented this unlawful strategy to secure as many votes as possible before Election Day."

Marisol Rodriguez, of 122 East Haverhill St., who said her parents were prevented from voting for Devers in the primary by Annette Webster, an election worker who supported Lantigua's campaign.

Rosa Ortiz, of 198 Essex St., who said Webster told her she was not registered to vote. She later checked with the city's elections division who said she was.

Octavio Cabrera, of 45 Basswood St., a first-time voter who went to Lantigua's office to find out where he should go to vote. He said Lantigua tried to convince him to vote by absentee ballot instead. He chose not to, however, and left Lantigua's office, he said.

In addition to filing suit, Guerrero has also written letters to the House Committee on Ethics and Secretary of State, asking both to investigate "the use of fraudulent absentee ballots and other abuses of the electoral process by Mr. Lantigua, his campaign supporters and staff."

Guerrero also asked Ethics Committee chairman, state Rep. James Fagan, to start proceedings "to disqualify Mr. Lantigua from being seated as a member of the house."

A preliminary hearing date on the suit has not been set.

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