

## NAACP Sues Elections Boards Over Voter Rolls

By Administrator

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Local elections boards in North Carolina are illegally removing thousands of voters from the rolls the NAACP alleges in a federal lawsuit filed Monday. Voters are being removed because of challenges filed by individuals, which the NAACP says is illegal under federal law less than 90 days before an election. However, state officials say it's legal under state law.

Early voting already has begun in this critical swing state, where officials and the courts have tussled over voting hours and other issues of poll access.

The group's lawsuit zeroes in on Cumberland, Moore and Beaufort counties, where thousands of voters' names have been challenged.

In most cases, mail sent to an address is returned as undeliverable, which county boards can accept as evidence that the voter no longer lives there.

The lawsuit says the state law, and the removals, are in violation of the National Voter Registration Act. It also asks to restore the names of voters who already have been removed.

Among those challenged in Beaufort County was a 100-year-old black woman, Grace Bell Hardison, who uses a post office box for mail. She learned about the challenge from a list in the local newspaper, said her nephew, Greg Satterthwaite. Her options were to go to a hearing — and she only leaves her home once a month — or sign a form, get it notarized and have someone attend the hearing for her.

The man who filed that and many other challenges in the county, Shane Hubers, said he abandoned it after learning of Hardison's situation. He said he told county election officials he'll do the same if people have an explanation: "I've not raised a fuss. I'm not vindictive."

The people filing challenges in Cumberland and Moore counties say they're volunteers with the Voter Integrity Project. The group's director, Jay

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, says he wants to reduce the potential for voter fraud.

Individuals have challenged 4,500 voters in Beaufort, Cumberland and Moore counties in August and September — with more than 3,900 of those in Cumberland County, the director of the State Board of Elections, Kim Westbrook

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, said in a letter to the NAACP.

However, it's not clear how many of those people have had their registrations struck from the rolls. Elections officials and the challengers say few people attend the hearings over their challenges; many have moved and haven't updated their registration, while others have died.

The NAACP says the challenges have disproportionately affected black voters. The NAACP says the challenges have disproportionately affected black voters, who comprise 53 percent of registered voters in

Belhaven

, where all the Beaufort County challenges were filed, and more than 65 percent of challenges.

Cumberland County's election director said similar figures there would not be made available. The elections director in Monroe County said she was compiling those figures this week.

People can register to vote and vote on the same day during early voting, which continues through Nov. 5. However, if someone removed from the rolls tries to vote on Election Day, they cast a provisional ballot that the county board of elections must then decide whether to count.

Kellie Hopkins, director of the Beaufort County Board of Elections, said she was concerned someone who moved to a different address within the county may not be able to cast a regular ballot on Election Day.