

NEWS

Worthington man accused of voting twice in recent District 518 referendum

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WORTHINGTON - Criminal charges were filed Friday accusing a Worthington man of committing voter fraud in the recent Independent School District 518 bond referendum election.

Larry F. Reker, 65, has been charged with felony unlawful voting - voting more than once in the same election - after allegedly casting both an absentee ballot and physically voting at the polling place during the district's Feb. 13 special election. The offense is punishable by up to five years imprisonment, a \$10,000 fine or both.

According to the criminal complaint, an investigation involving suspected voter fraud involving the district's \$68.5 million ballot question began Feb. 27.

Documentation from the Nobles County Auditor/Treasurer's Office indicates Reker submitted an absentee ballot at the Nobles County Government Center on Feb. 12. Reker's signature was also allegedly on documentation administered by the election judges from the special election's sole Feb. 13 polling location, Lakeside Church.

Reker told law enforcement he cast an absentee ballot two to four weeks prior to the Feb. 13 election date. He didn't think he voted the day before, the complaint states.

Reker admitted going to Lakeside Church Feb. 13 with another individual. He provided his signature, but did not cast another vote, he claimed.

According to an election judge, the number of signatures from the polling place aligned with the number of ballots processed electronically through the voting machine.

The complaint also states the auditor/treasurer's office provided the school district with a roster of individuals that cast absentee ballots on the Friday before the election. The office then provided a supplemental roster of names that cast an absentee ballot on Monday, Feb. 12 - the final day District 518 residents could vote early. The district was responsible for updating the roster and providing it to election judges, the auditor/treasurer's office told law enforcement.

Two election judges told law enforcement that - due to what they categorized as a historic number of absentee ballots for a given election - the roster had not been fully updated to reflect the additional day of absentee voting by Feb. 13.

The Nobles County Sheriff's Office contacted Reker again by telephone on April 5 with the updated information. He claimed he did not remember if he was handed a ballot Feb. 13 after signing the roster at the polling place. Also, he said he had already told law enforcement everything and declined to further discuss it.

Nobles County Attorney Kathleen Kusz did not comment on the case, but called the number of election fraud cases she has experienced in Nobles and Lyon counties over the past 30 years "vanishingly small."

Reker's first appearance in Nobles County District Court is scheduled for May 8.