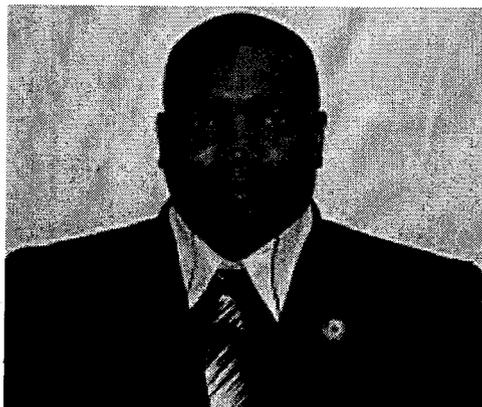


Marty Small campaign worker pleads guilty to ballot fraud

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A worker for the unsuccessful primary mayoral campaign of Atlantic City Councilman Marty Small pleaded guilty Tuesday to engaging in fraud involving messenger absentee ballots during the June Democratic primary.

Ronald Harris, 23, of Atlantic City, pleaded guilty to a charge of third-degree conspiracy to commit absentee ballot fraud before state Superior Court Judge Robert Neustadter in Mays Landing, according to state Criminal Justice Director Deborah L. Gramiccioni.

Under the plea agreement, the state will recommend that Harris be sentenced to a term of probation, conditioned upon him serving up to 364 days in the Atlantic County Jail. He may face a fine of up to \$15,000.

Harris was charged in a 10-count state grand jury indictment returned on Sept. 3, which also charged Small and 12 other campaign workers and operatives. The indictment resulted from an investigation led by the Division of Criminal Justice Corruption Bureau and the State Police Official Corruption Bureau.

In pleading guilty, Harris admitted that he conspired with others involved in Small's mayoral campaign to submit false documents related to the procurement, casting, or tabulation of messenger absentee ballots in the primary.

The charges are pending against the remaining defendants. Small and the other defendants are each charged in the indictment with conspiracy, four counts of election fraud, absentee ballot fraud, tampering with public records, falsifying records, and forgery. Four defendants are also charged with hindering apprehension or prosecution.

The indictment alleges that Small and the other defendants conspired to commit election fraud through the following schemes, among others:

They allegedly solicited applications for messenger absentee ballots from individuals not qualified to receive them and had the voters not fill in the name of the messenger, so they could fraudulently designate themselves as the authorized messengers or bearers.

They allegedly obtained messenger ballots from the county clerk and submitted them to the board of elections as votes on behalf of voters who, in fact, never received or voted the ballots or, in some cases, were given only the security envelope for the ballot and were told to sign it. Those voters were not given the opportunity to vote in most instances.

They allegedly picked up sealed absentee ballots from voters, unsealed them and, if they were votes for mayoral candidates other than Small, destroyed them, thereby disenfranchising those voters. If they were votes for Small, they allegedly resealed them and submitted them as votes.

They allegedly illegally instructed voters to fill in messenger ballots as votes for Small.

They allegedly submitted voter registration applications and messenger ballot applications on behalf of individuals who were not residents of Atlantic City, falsely representing they were.

They allegedly forged the signatures of voters on messenger ballots.

They allegedly fraudulently delivered messenger ballot applications and messenger ballots to voters simultaneously and instructed the voters to fill out both during the same visit.

Small and the indicted members of his campaign staff allegedly sought to maximize the number of absentee ballots messengered by the campaign by enlisting operatives and campaign workers to engage in fraud and by paying campaign workers based on how many messenger ballots they collected. The workers allegedly were told to direct voters to vote for the Small ticket, or simply have the voters sign the ballots so the workers could fill them out as votes for the Small ticket.

Deputy Attorney General Anthony Picione, the chief of the Corruption Bureau, and Deputy Attorney General Robert Czepiel Jr. took Harris' guilty plea. Sentencing is scheduled for Dec. 4.

The investigation was led for the State Police Lt. John Redkoles, and detectives Sgt. 1st Class Karl E. Ulbrich, Sgt. David A. Smith, Sgt. John Pizzuro, Scott Orman, Anthony Carugno, James Sansone, David Caracciolo and John Scalabrini. Deputy Attorney General Peter Lee assisted for the Corruption Bureau.

Gramiccioni noted that the Division of Criminal Justice has established a toll-free Corruption Tipline 1-866-TIPS-4CJ. Additionally, the public can log on to the division's web site at www.njdcj.org to confidentially report suspected wrongdoing.

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