Ohio man sentenced for crimes relating to 2024 El Paso County Commissioner race

COLORADO SPRINGS – An Ohio man, arrested on suspicion of hundreds of counts of Elections Forgery and Perjury-Election Offenses, has been convicted and sentenced in the Fourth Judicial District for crimes he committed during a local election.

The voting verification process employed by the El Paso County Clerk and Recorder's Office flagged a significant number of petition signatures in connection with David Leinweber's 2024 campaign for El Paso County Commissioner (District 3). The affected signatures were submitted by 29-year-old Juan Pichardo, then employed by a petition signature gathering company sub-contracted to support Mr. Leinweber's campaign.

After reviewing those packets, the Clerk and Recorder's Office alerted the 4th Judicial District Attorney's Office, which is responsible for investigating and prosecuting potential election fraud within its judicial district.

"The integrity of our elections begins long before ballots are ever cast," said El Paso County Clerk and Recorder Steve Schleiker. "The detection of fraudulent petition signatures by my office demonstrates the effectiveness of the safeguards and verification processes we have in place. I am incredibly proud of our elections staff for their diligence, attention to detail, and unwavering commitment to protecting the democratic process."
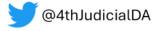
During the DAO's investigation, it was determined there was probable cause that Mr. Pichardo had committed a crime and a warrant was filed for his arrest. Mr. Pichardo was extradited from his home in Ohio, held in custody, and prosecuted in Colorado's 4th Judicial District.

"I want to thank the Clerk and Recorders Office for their diligence and attention to detail. Their early detection of potentially fraudulent petition signatures was instrumental in my office's investigation and subsequent prosecution of this defendant," said District Attorney Michael J. Allen. "The fundamental principles of our democracy are based upon the integrity of our elections processes and the staff members who consistently seek accuracy, and – lacking that – accountability. It's why the citizens of this county can be confident in the outcomes of our local elections."

Ultimately, Mr. Pichardo pleaded guilty to 10 counts of Elections – Forgery, CRS 1-13-106; 18-5-102, a Class 5 Felony, and 39 counts of Perjury – Election Offense, CRS 1-13-104; 18-8-503, a Class 2 Misdemeanor.

He was sentenced to two years of supervised probation and is being held financially responsible for the costs incurred by his prosecution and extradition.

"I am deeply appreciative of the outstanding work of the 4th Judicial District Attorney's Office. Their swift and thorough investigation reinforces the strong partnership between our two offices. Together, we are proud to be the only county in Colorado with a designated voter-fraud investigator on staff—further proof of our shared dedication to transparency, accountability, and public trust," said CAR Schleiker. "This case is clear proof that our system works: if we identify irregularities, we report them immediately and ensure accountability through the proper legal channels. El Paso County voters can have complete confidence that every legitimate signature and every valid vote is protected."

The collaborative effort displayed by both offices is further evidence that county agencies are putting their citizens first.

"Working together, the Clerk and Recorders Office and the District Attorney's Office, identified a bad actor intent on fraudulently and illegally impacting our elections, and held that person accountable," said DA Allen.

Anyone who suspects voter fraud has occurred should make a report to their local election office, FBI office, U.S. Attorney's office, or the Public Integrity Section of The Department of Justice's criminal division.

Note to the Media: All updates will only come from Communications when available.
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