

Protesters in Raleigh Demand Action in Bladen County Election Fraud

By Sarah E. Kiser

An ardent group of disgruntled voters traversed the state Friday to protest a lack of action in the Ninth Congressional House District voter fraud investigation. They attempted to deliver a petition to the U.S. Attorney's office, but were turned away.

It was a long time coming for the organizers- while some had been fighting for justice in the case since the news broke after the election, others have spent the last two years pushing for an investigation into missing absentee ballots, according to Marcus Bass, Deputy Director of the North Carolina Black Alliance.

The election results from the Ninth U.S. House district of North Carolina remain unsettled as allegations stack against Republican candidate Mark Harris -initially thought to have won the election by 905 votes according to the News & Observer- claiming he hired Leslie McCrae Dowless as a campaign consultant aware of his previous dealings in irregular election practices. Dowless has been suspected of illegally stealing absentee ballots since 2016, according to the [Associated Press' December 19 report](#). State officials wanted to bring charges against him then, but nothing was done about it. Three dozen protesters came out to march Friday believing similar political stonewalling afoot.

The hearing was meant to take place on or by December 21, but three days later the Board of Elections announced the hearing would be moved to January 11, awaiting some documents. But by Friday, North Carolina was lacking something else important to hold a Board of Elections hearing: a board of elections.

The board was dissolved on December 28 by the Republican-controlled legislature after a state court ruled that the board's makeup was unconstitutional. A new board will reconvene at the end of this month with five members, no more than three from one party. Until that happens, the hearing is postponed indefinitely. The board's staff continues to investigate, but there have been no public results thus far.

So with no board and no updates, concerned voters tried to take justice into their own hands. Protesters from Bladen and Robeson counties joined the NC Black Alliance, Progress North Carolina, Democracy NC, Southern Coalition for Social Justice, NC NAACP to deliver a petition bearing 2,200 signatures to the U.S. Attorney Robert

Higdon's office. The group demanded a meeting with Higdon Friday, bearing signs reading, "stop stealing votes."

Marcher Deborah Bell passionately reiterated this message.

"I live in Bladen County and I believe our votes were stolen by Mark Harris and the other republicans, all of those who hired McCrae Dowless to steal votes," Bell said. "This is personal to me."

Walking alongside her was Dwight Sheppard, who helped organize the day's events. "[We want] an investigation, a new election, and just bring justice to those who have done wrong in this election and previous elections," Sheppard said.

Bell says McCready should be seated or a new election should be held. Sheppard doesn't think this is an accident. He believes Harris sought out McCrae knowing how absentee ballots would be handled.

"[Harris] is a crook," Bell said. "Mark Harris paid McCrae Dowless, as well as other Republicans...to fix the vote."

The protesters marched steadily to Higdon's office with signatures in hand.

"We wanted to ask for a meeting for the Bladen residents," Jen Ferris representing Progress N.C. explained over the phone. However, the protesters were "turned away at the door of the U.S. attorney's office immediately" Ferris said.

"They are there to serve democracy, and the fact that meeting people from the district, meeting people who are affected by these voting irregularities is not a priority to them or not on their radar is disappointing," Ferris said.

Higdon's office did not accept the petition. It remains in possession of the organizers, who hope to meet with Hignon and share their stories as the probe into voter fraud continues.

"They should have been investigating all along," Ferris said. "Today was our formal ask for an investigation."