



# Wisconsin Elections Commission

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March 22, 2024

Executive Director Claire Woodall  
City of Milwaukee Election Commission  
200 E. Wells St., Rm. 501  
Milwaukee, WI 53202-3515

Ieshuh Griffin  
2722A N. Richards Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53212

**Sent via email to:** [eyeforjustice@yahoo.com](mailto:eyeforjustice@yahoo.com), [cwooda@milwaukee.gov](mailto:cwooda@milwaukee.gov), [kblock@milwaukee.gov](mailto:kblock@milwaukee.gov)

**In the Matter of:** Ieshuh Griffin v. City of Milwaukee Election Commission and Claire Woodall (EL 24-07)

Dear Ms. Griffin and Executive Director Woodall:

This letter is in response to the verified complaint submitted by Ieshuh Griffin (Complainant) to the Wisconsin Elections Commission (Commission), which was filed in reply to actions taken by the City of Milwaukee Election Commission (MEC) and its Executive Director, Claire Woodall (referred to collectively as “the Respondent”) concerning its Aldermanic District 15 ballot access decision following a challenge.

The Commission provides the following analysis and decision. In short, the Commission finds that the Complainant did not show probable cause to believe that a violation of law or abuse of discretion occurred with relation to ballot access for Milwaukee’s Aldermanic District 15.

## Commission Authority and Role in Resolving Complaints Filed Under Wis. Stat. § 5.06

Under Wis. Stat. §§ 5.05(1)(e) and 5.06(6), the Commission is provided with the inherent, general, and specific authority to consider the submissions of the parties to a complaint and to issue findings. In instances where no material facts appear to be in dispute, the Commission may summarily issue a decision and provide that decision to the affected parties. This letter serves as the Commission’s final decision regarding the issues raised in this complaint.

The Commission’s role in resolving verified complaints filed under Wis. Stat. § 5.06, which challenge the decisions or actions of local election officials, is to determine whether a local official acted contrary to applicable election laws or abused their discretion in administering applicable election laws.

Complaints “...shall set forth such facts as are within the knowledge of the Complainant to show probable cause to believe that a violation of law or abuse of discretion has occurred or will occur.” Wis. Stat. § 5.06(1). Probable cause is defined in Wis. Admin. Code § EL 20.02(4) to mean “the facts and reasonable inferences that together are sufficient to justify a reasonable, prudent person, acting with caution, to believe that the matter asserted is probably true.”

*Commissioners*

Don M. Millis, chair | Marge Bostelmann | Ann S. Jacobs | Carrie Riepl | Robert Spindell | Mark L. Thomsen

*Administrator*  
Meagan Wolfe

## The Complaint

The complaint seeks to reverse the alleged January 8 decision of the Respondent to “REMOVE [the Complainant’s] name from the ballot for alderperson for the 15<sup>th</sup> District.” The complaint alleges that the Respondent on January 2 stated that 221 of 270 signatures were verified as District 15 electors, and that the Respondent did not contact the Complainant about a reversal of that initial communication. The Complainant alleges that the Respondent informed her of a challenge to her nomination papers on January 5, and that she was emailed an agenda and link to the meeting on January 8.

The complaint makes a number of allegations against the Respondent, including that the Respondent allegedly “colluded with Stamper, and Johns to have [the Complainant] impermissibly removed from the ballot, by creating fictitious nomination papers with dead people names,” allowed candidates to “impersonat[e] Milwaukee Election Commission officials,” denied the Complainant due process and the ability to ask questions or cross examine witnesses during the meeting, lied about addresses and handwriting concerning nomination papers, accepted an invalid challenge, failed to inform the Complainant of the ability to submit correcting affidavits, withheld exculpatory evidence, and incorrectly struck names.

The Complainant also alleges that the Respondent struck two addresses as nonexistent but alleges that the addresses exist within the district. The addresses are 2817 W North Avenue and 2612 W Center St. She states that she is eligible for ballot access and asks the Commission to order the Respondent to place her name on the ballot for the 15<sup>th</sup> Aldermanic District.

The complaint also includes audio recordings, communications with the Respondent, the Complainant’s response to the ballot access challenge, and two screenshots showing the polling places for the addresses that were alleged to be improperly struck. One audio recording is of the January 8 MEC meeting, and the other two involve discussions of affidavits that were collected from residents in the challenge.

## The Response

The response admits that during the initial review of the Complainant’s nomination papers, “of the 270 signatures she submitted, 221 appeared to be from valid electors residing in the 15<sup>th</sup> Aldermanic District and that her name would be recommended for ballot placement.” The response alleges that on January 5, alderman and candidate Russell Stamper filed a challenge against 41 of the Complainant’s signatures, and that the Complainant was notified of the challenge by phone, emailed a copy, and told that the challenge would be heard on January 8. The Respondent admits receiving the Complainant’s response to the challenge.

The response alleges that Respondent Woodall “walked the MEC through staff analysis of each of 41 separate challenges made by Stamper,” that the nomination papers were shown to the members of the MEC, that both parties were given five minutes to present. The response alleges that Respondent MEC agreed with the staff analysis of the challenge and struck 25 signatures. As a result, the MEC determined that the Complainant was below the requirement of 200 valid signatures, and thus did not grant ballot access. The response alleges that the Complainant did not “attempt to rebut any elements of the challenge with anything other than conclusory allegations.” The response alleges that all documents were properly notarized.

The response alleges that the signature on line one of page nine (alleged by the challenger to be the deceased Marvin Bizzel) was accepted as valid by Respondent MEC with the name Maybell Bizzel. Regarding the handwriting allegation, the response alleges that the name of Reginald Vernel was struck

after an affidavit was provided by a person with the name Reginald Vernell residing at that address, who is registered to vote at that address, stating that he did not sign the nomination paper. The response alleges that the signature on page one, line one, was not struck due to illegibility, but due to address location.

Concerning the two address allegations, the response admits that both addresses fall in the relevant district. The response states that the 2817 W North Avenue address “was an empty commercial real estate property owned by the City since 2016” and that “[s]taff confirmed with the Department of City Development it was unoccupied.” Regarding the 2612 W Center St. address, the response states that it “is a house of worship” and that “[b]ecause it could be that an elector is temporarily using the church to receive services, a presumption of validity was applied and the signature was preserved.” These decisions are reflected in the MEC staff recommendation document provided in the response.

### The Reply

The reply alleges that the “factual background” section of the response is false and that the email sent by Respondent Woodall did not state that “upon initial review there appeared to be 221 valid signatures,” adding that the Respondent has stated that the review process consists of “an initial review FOLLOWED by an ‘executive review’ by the Milwaukee Election Commission.” The reply alleges that the Respondent lied about the Complainant’s response to the challenge, stating that the response refuted the “non verified complaint of Stamper (as an attorney cannot act as a witness and counsel)” stating also that the Complainant filed an affidavit of correction after being provided with a “signature review tracker” on January 5, but that the affidavit was not included by the Respondent in the meeting on January 8. The Complainant alleges that the respondent refused to allow the Complainant to turn in additional signatures for the 15<sup>th</sup> district on January 5. The reply alleges that the respondent gave candidate Stamper “exclusive access to the nomination papers” and alleges that the papers were modified. The reply alleges that the Respondent “altered affidavits.” The reply alleges that the Complainant was denied a “full, fair and impartial formal adjudicatory hearing,” and did not state findings of fact and conclusions of law.

The reply included an “affidavit of correction” document regarding the nomination signature review tracker provided to the Complainant on January 5. The document states that “the circulators have ERRONEOUSLY marked that several signatures are outside of the district and that is INCORRECT, I have provided a SUFFICIENT amount of nomination signatures WITHIN the district and as such have met all conditions precedent.” The reply also included four audio files, including the three that were also attached to the complaint. The fourth audio file discusses the term City of Milwaukee appearing on the header of a document and individuals claiming they were from the City of Milwaukee Election Commission.

Other claims relate to the challenges of the Complainant against candidate Stamper and other candidates, and statements that the Executive Director should be removed from office.

The reply states that a city worker was an unverified witness and provided “hearsay that a building had been vacant.”

### Discussion

The initial complaint before the Commission did not state how many signatures were struck by the Respondent after the challenge submitted against the Complainant’s nomination papers for Aldermanic District 15, leaving the Commission unsure how many signatures were at issue regarding ballot access.

After reviewing the response, the Commission believes that MEC determined there to be 196 valid signatures. The complaint did not include copies of the nomination papers, the challenge, or any final decision of the MEC. Further, the complaint did not identify any specific lines for the Commission to examine regarding alleged improper actions of the MEC.

The complaint makes numerous allegations against the Respondent. The Commission finds almost all of them to be unclear, insufficiently developed, and unsupported by evidence, in particular the claims of collusion between the Executive Director and the other candidates. In all, only three specific names are mentioned in the complaint. Marvin Bizzle and Althea Anderson's names are mentioned, but the Complainant appears to state that the first is deceased and the second does not reside in an "elderly facility." It is unclear what pages these names appear on or what the Complainant is asking the Commission to find regarding them. Though the Commission could not have found probable cause on the basis of these unclear allegations, it notes that the response did provide copies of the challenge and clarified that the first name was understood as Maybell Bizzel and was preserved, and that Althea Anderson is a property manager who submitted affidavits within the challenge. The complaint does not clearly allege why the MEC should have disregarded Anderson's affidavits regarding specific signatures. If Anderson was coerced into doing something, the complaint does not explain how or provide any evidence in support of the claim, and the Commission cannot find probable cause of any specific violation regarding the allegations.

In paragraph 22, the complaint states that a signature allegedly with the last name Hu was struck on page one, but it does not identify the line or provide the image of the signature. Thus, the Commission cannot evaluate whether or not the signature was struck or why. The response states that the signature on line one of page one was struck due to an address issue, though on page 41 and 42 of the response it appears that the MEC struck the signature due to an illegibility challenge. However, since it was not clear which signature was at issue or why specifically it should not have been struck the Commission is not able to evaluate the allegation regarding it and does not find probable cause to disturb the MEC's actions.

Regarding the procedural allegations, the Complainant's complaint and reply, along with the supporting audio files and evidence, show that the Complainant was in communication with the Respondent concerning the nomination papers, and that she was informed of the challenge and the meeting of the MEC to determine ballot access. The Complainant submitted a correcting affidavit document, a response to the challenge, and spoke at the meeting, showing that she knew of the challenge to her nomination papers and made an attempt before the MEC to defend them. No evidence was provided showing that the MEC denied her the opportunity to correct her nomination papers or to respond to the challenge. Further, the response included the original challenge, and it appears that the attorney notarized his client's certification.

The complaint alleges that two signatures were struck for being "nonexistent" and provided an argument and evidence that such addresses did exist within the district. The complaint states that the addresses of 2817 W North Avenue and 2612 W Center St. exist within the 15<sup>th</sup> aldermanic district. The Complainant provided screenshots as evidence that the addresses existed, though no additional geographic information was provided showing that they were in District 15. The response admits that both addresses are within District 15, and states that the Center Street address was determined to be a house of worship and not struck, meaning that that signature was counted toward the total. Regarding the North Avenue address, it appears that address was struck after the City, which alleges ownership of the property, via the Department of City Development, stated that the property was unoccupied. Filing officers are directed by Wis. Admin. Code § EL 2.07(1) to "apply the standards in s. EL 2.05 to determine the sufficiency of nomination papers, including consulting extrinsic sources of evidence under s. EL 2.05 (3)." The Respondent filing officer

consulted extrinsic sources of evidence, in this case speaking to a staff member of the owner of the property, and determined that the property was unoccupied.

The Commission does not find an abuse of discretion in the filing officer striking this signature after determining that the address was a vacant lot that was also unoccupied. The Commission notes that while it would be possible for a qualified elector to reside in a vacant lot, the initial burden to strike the signature was met, and the response to the challenge, the correcting affidavit, this complaint, and this reply do not provide any reason to believe that the property was occupied.

Overall, the complaint does not state with specificity what signatures the Commission is being asked to consider. The Commission will only examine the specific claims that are raised in a complaint and will not construct additional arguments. The only clear allegations made and supported by evidence in the complaint are the two address allegations. After considering the response, the Commission found that only one of the two addresses was struck, and that there was no abuse of discretion in the MEC's decision to uphold that specific challenge.

The broad claims of collusion and unequal treatment are not supported by evidence and are contradicted by the fact that the Complainant submitted correcting affidavits, a response to the challenge, and appeared at the January 8 meeting. The MEC also provided a document showing the staff review of the challenge and the reasons for its recommendations. There does not appear to be anything suggesting that the MEC conducted an improper initial review of the nomination papers or improperly administered the challenge, and the Commission does not find an abuse of discretion in its procedural actions.

Finally, the Commission reviewed the audio recordings, but did not find them to bolster any of the claims made in the complaint. Whether a property manager should be signing affidavits regarding residents may be an interesting question, but it is not a question the Commission can address absent a clear allegation that the information provided was false. It is not clear what the Commission is being asked to address regarding the affidavits. It is not clear whether the allegation is that the affidavits were signed by the property manager and should not have been, or whether the individual who signed was someone other than the document claimed. The Commission cannot find probable cause that MEC's actions were improper concerning the acceptance of some of those affidavits.

The additional audio file attached to the reply appears to depict someone who is not identified claiming that two individuals claimed to be with the City of Milwaukee Election Commission who showed names of individuals related to the challenge. Without any further information concerning who the individuals were or what allegation the Commission is being asked to analyze, the Commission cannot find probable cause for an allegation based on this audio file.

### Commission Decision

Based upon the above review and analysis, the Commission does not find probable cause to believe that a violation of law or abuse of discretion has occurred regarding the MEC and Executive Director Woodall's actions concerning ballot access for Aldermanic District 15.

### Right to Appeal – Circuit Court

This letter constitutes the Commission's resolution of this complaint. Wis. Stat. § 5.06(2). Pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 5.06(8), any aggrieved party may appeal this decision to circuit court no later than 30 days after the issuance of this decision.

If any of the parties should have questions about this letter or the Commission's decision, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

**WISCONSIN ELECTIONS COMMISSION**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Meagan R.M. Wolfe". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "M".

Meagan Wolfe  
Administrator

cc: Commission Members