

Clark, Stanley file suit over ban

Complaint: GOP move ‘retaliatory,’ unconstitutional

BY COURTNEY H UGHETT Brown County Democrat

Brown County Commissioner Tim Clark and his attorney, Richard Stanley, have filed a federal **lawsuit** against the Brown County **Election Board**, seeking to block a fiveyear disqualification imposed by the Indiana Republican Party that bars them from running for public office as Republicans.

The complaint, filed July 25 in the U.S.

District Court for the Southern District of Indiana, challenges what Clark and Stanley call “retaliatory” and unconstitutional actions by party leadership after they raised concerns about alleged rule violations by the local GOP chair.

The case pits two elected Republicans against their own party’s disciplinary system, raising complex questions about internal



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party governance, **election** law, and the boundary between political organizations and public ballot access.

According to the court filing, Clark alleges that Brown County Republican Party Chair Mark Bowman violated Rule 1-25, a state GOP rule that forbids Republican officials from supporting non- Republican candidates over Republican nominees in general elections.

Clark, who ran for and won the district 3 county commissioner seat in 2024, said Bowman and others backed Independent candidate Greg Taggart during the general **election**. One cited example includes former Commissioner Blake Wolpert, who was photographed wearing a Taggart campaign shirt during a government meeting.

The **lawsuit** includes exhibits with photographs and sworn witness statements, including one from Clark, asserting that Bowman coordinated support for Taggart, undermining the Republican nominee’s campaign from within the party structure.

“Mr. Bowman was not the only Republican in Brown County who was guilty of violating Rule 1-25,” Clark wrote. “But he was the architect of this improper scheme and removing him from office is hoped to be enough to correct the current problems plaguing the Brown County Republican Party.”

Clark contends that the current retaliation stems from his call for greater transparency and his refusal to go along with Bowman’s slate of preferred candidates.

After the **election**, Clark and Stanley filed a formal complaint with the Indiana Republican Party in December 2024, asking for Bowman to be removed from his position.

Instead of disciplining Bowman, the Ninth District Republican Committee responded in January 2025 by finding Clark and Stanley themselves “not Republicans in good standing”, a designation that carries a five-year ban on running for office under the Republican label.

A formal appeal filed by Stanley and Clark to the state GOP was rejected in May, with party officials declaring the matter closed and “not subject to further appeal.”

The **lawsuit** argues this decision is retaliatory and violates their First and Fourteenth Amendment rights by interfering with their ability to run for office and associate politically.

“This is a matter of ballot access,” the complaint states. “Mr.

Clark currently holds office as a Republican and intends to run again. Mr. Stanley also wishes to seek office in Brown County. The party’s internal ruling, if enforced by the **election board**, would effectively prevent them from doing so.” The Republican Party has not filed a formal response in court, but party records and exhibits included in the **lawsuit** suggest the GOP believed Clark and Stanley’s own actions undermined party unity.

The **lawsuit** leans heavily on the 2022 federal case *Hero v. Lake County Election Board*, in which the court ruled that an **election board** could not deny a candidate ballot access based solely on internal party rulings.

Clark and Stanley argue that ballot eligibility is a public matter, not a party decision, and that disqualification by the GOP, if enforced by the Brown County **Election Board**, would represent government suppression of their political rights.

To that end, the suit names only the Brown County **Election Board** as a defendant. Stanley previously contacted the **board** on July 2 requesting a written statement that it would not enforce the GOP ruling, but the **board** declined to issue one, prompting the **lawsuit**.

The case has been assigned to U.S. District Judge Tanya Walton Pratt. As of press time, the **Election Board** has not filed a response, and no hearing dates have been set.

If the court sides with Clark and Stanley, it may limit how far parties can go in enforcing internal discipline when it affects public elections. If the court upholds the GOP’s position, parties could gain more authority to block candidates from using their label, even if those candidates win voter support.

For now, Tim Clark remains in office, preparing for his next **election** while locked in a legal battle with the same political party whose banner he carried to victory.