

Stanley files new lawsuit after removal from GOP primary ballot

By Courtney H ughett Brown County Democrat

Richard Stanley Jr. is continuing his fight to get back on the May 5 Republican primary ballot for Brown County Commissioner District 2, and the case has now grown more complicated after the local judge stepped aside and the Indiana Supreme Court was asked to appoint a special judge.

Stanley filed a lawsuit Feb. 20, one day after the Brown County Election Board voted to remove him from the Republican primary ballot. He is asking the court to order the board to put his name back on the ballot, arguing that the decision was wrong and unconstitutional.

At the same time he filed his lawsuit, Stanley also filed an emergency request asking the court to act quickly. He argues that the Republican primary season is already underway and that every day he remains off the ballot hurts his campaign and the voters who would support him.

The Election Board voted Feb. 19 to remove Stanley after a formal challenge was filed by Brown County Republican Party Chairman Mark Bowman. The challenge claimed Stanley was not a Republican in “good standing” and also pointed to an error in his candidacy paperwork.

Stanley’s court filings explain that the “good standing” issue dates back to 2024 and 2025. After the 2024 election, Stanley helped former Commissioner Tim Clark file a complaint within the Indiana Republican Party. Clark accused Bowman of violating party rules by supporting independent candidate Greg Taggart during Clark’s re-election race.

Instead of disciplining Bowman, the District 9 officers of the Indiana Republican Party dismissed Clark’s complaint and banned both Clark and Stanley from participating as Republican candidates for five years. The party said Stanley was banned because he contributed money to Taggart’s campaign.

Stanley says that accusation is false. In his filings, he states that his wife wrote two checks from their joint checking account to Taggart’s campaign and that she alone signed the checks. He argues that campaign finance rules say contributions from a joint account are credited to the person who signs the check. According to Stanley, someone listed his name instead of his wife’s name on Taggart’s campaign finance report.

Stanley says he presented that information to the Election Board before the Feb. 19 hearing, including written statements and copies of the checks. Despite that, the board voted to remove him from the ballot.

Stanley argues that it is unfair and unconstitutional for a government body to make a decision based on information he says is false. He also argues that because primary elections are run by the government, the Election Board cannot simply enforce a political party’s internal decision without following constitutional protections.

The Election Board also cited a second issue during



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the Feb. 19 hearing. Stanley’s candidate form listed him as a voter in Jackson 4 precinct. Stanley says that precinct was recently merged into Jackson 3. He argues the mistake is minor and does not affect his eligibility to run for Commissioner District 2, which is based on where he lives. He also says he was not told about the

precinct issue until just before he was given five minutes to present his defense at the hearing and that he was not given a chance to correct the form.

After Stanley filed his lawsuit, Brown Circuit Court Judge Mary Wertz recused herself from the case on Feb. 23. In her order, she stated that she would not take further action in the matter.

Under normal circumstances, local court rules would allow the clerk of the Brown Circuit Court to select the next eligible special judge. However, in this case, the clerk is also a voting member of the Brown County Election Board - the defendant in the lawsuit.

Because of that potential conflict, Judge Wertz filed paperwork Feb. 25 asking the Indiana Supreme Court to appoint a special judge instead. The filing states that allowing the clerk to select the judge in a case where the clerk is connected to the defendant could create the appearance of impropriety and undermine public confidence.

Meanwhile, Stanley asked the recused judge to at least set deadlines for briefing his emergency request while waiting for a new judge. He argued that the rules allow a judge to handle emergency matters during a judge change. Judge Wertz responded that once she issued an official order of recusal, she could no longer take action in the case.

As a result, the case is now paused while waiting for the Indiana Supreme Court to appoint a special judge.

This state court fight comes after a related federal lawsuit Stanley and Clark filed in July 2025 against the Brown County Election Board. In that case, they argued that enforcing the Republican Party's five-year ban would violate their constitutional rights. A federal judge dismissed that lawsuit in January 2026 in favor of the Election Board. Stanley and Clark have appealed that decision to the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals, where it remains pending.

For now, Stanley remains off the May 2026 Republican primary ballot unless a special judge orders otherwise.