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FILES 'DID NOT TRANSFER'

322 signatures missing from USB drive of petition to repeal county non-discrimination ordinance

By Michael P. Buffer MBUFFER@CITIZENSVOICE.COM

The USB drive released to the public with records of the referendum petition to repeal Luzerne

County's new non-discrimination ordinance did not contain 56 pages with 322 signatures.

Those pages "did not transfer to the USB drive," Karissa Kross, Office of Law executive secretary, said

Wednesday in an email. The missing pages explain a discrepancy noted in a petition challenge filed Monday by County Councilman Chris Belles, and now the petition will more than likely survive the challenge.

Belles claimed the committee seeking the referendum collected 1,109 valid signatures, which is 52 below the 1,162 threshold required for the referendum to proceed. Belles filed his challenge with the county election board.

The petitioners committee had to collect at least 1,161 valid signatures - 1% of the total number of votes cast in Luzerne County in the last gubernatorial election - by June

23, which was the 14th day after the non-discrimination ordinance was adopted. The committee is now trying to get at least 11,615 signatures - 10% of county votes cast in the 2022 gubernatorial election - by the 60th day.

The committee claimed 1,899 signatures were on the petition submitted June 23. Belles said only

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'The heart of a giant'

Trooper Michael Pahira remembered during service



Ladder trucks display an American flag at the North Schuylkill Junior/Senior High School entrance as agencies gather for the memorial service of Trooper Michael E. Pahira Jr. AISHWARYA BEHL/STAFF PHOTOS

By Michael Urban MURBAN@REPUBLICANHERALD.COM

Whether he was performing safety inspections of tractor-trailers along Schuylkill County highways, moving back home to Ashland to help his mother with her cancer battle or guiding people to safety through the dark and smoke of a burning Pottsville rowhome, Trooper Michael Pahira Jr. always put the well-being of others above his own.

That sentiment was repeated again and again on Wednesday morning by speakers ranging from Pahira's family, to his best friend, to Gov. Josh Shapiro during the

fallen trooper's memorial service held in the North Schuylkill High School auditorium.

"The only thing bigger than Mikey's cowboy hat was his heart," funeral director Tim Sullivan said during the service, recounting what one of Pahira's friends told him.

The ceremony took place one week after Pahira was struck and killed by an out-of-control tractor-trailer while conducting a commercial vehicle check along Interstate 81 in Cass Township. The 44-year-old had served as a trooper for almost 20 years, most recently working as a motor carrier

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Officers salute as police vehicles arrive at North Schuylkill Junior/Senior High School.

ASHLEY Charges: 'Bored' firefighters called in false alarms

Pair of volunteers allegedly made more than 30 false calls

By James Halpin JHALPIN@CITIZENSVOICE.COM

Two volunteer Ashley firefighters, including one who previously worked as a call taker for the Luzerne County 911 center, are accused of calling in over two dozen false reports of fires, crashes and floods because they were bored while driving around the borough, according to charges filed in court this week.

Capt. Zachary Xavier Gensel, 19, of Ashley, and firefighter Cody Allen Wilson, 21, of Sugar Notch, are accused of calling in more than 30 false alarms between Jan. 1, 2025, and May 27.

According to the charges, the 911 call center received numerous calls from the pair reporting a variety of fires, vehicle crashes, smoke investigations, fire alarms, burning complaints, flooded roadways and downed wires.

Each report required a response from police and/or firefighters prior to being deemed unfounded.

Luzerne County detectives began investigating the pair in May after the call center reported the "abundance of false 911 calls," according to the complaint.

An internal investigation by the center revealed that Gensel, a former call center employee, had sent a text message to 911 while he was sitting at his workstation during a shift at the center at 100 Young St., Hanover Twp., according to the complaint.

During questioning, the pair admitted that they had been bored while driving around together in a command vehicle owned by the Ashley Fire Department. They

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Kingston amends zoning laws to comply with lawsuit

Justice Dept. claimed existing code violated religious rights

By Bob Kalinowski BKALINOWSKI@CITIZENSVOICE.COM

KINGSTON - Following a spirited debate between citizens during a public hearing, Kingston's council on Tuesday night voted to unanimously amend its zoning ordinance

after the U.S. Department of Justice claimed its existing code violated religious rights.

Some members of the Orthodox Jewish community, who triggered the federal intervention, claimed the amended ordinance remained unconstitutional and a violation of First Amendment rights.

Some longtime Kingston residents claimed the amendments make it easier for untaxed religious groups to populate properties with dormitories, schools and houses of worship - which would lead to traffic and parking problems in places that have long been strictly residential.

Stephen Rhoads, a West Chester-based attorney selected by Kingston's insurance carrier to handle the litigation, assured the crowded

meeting room that the Department of Justice was satisfied with the amended version of the ordinance after months of consultation.

"At this time, we feel the amendments meet the consent order," Council President Kate McMahon said prior to the unanimous vote, referring to an agreement with the Department of Justice.

The Justice Department

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Kingston's council on Tuesday voted to amend its zoning ordinance after the U.S. Department of Justice claimed its existing code violated religious rights. BOB KALINOWSKI/STAFF PHOTO

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