



NEWS RELEASE

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Register of Deeds

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Macomb County Clerk Alarmed About Citizenship Affecting Jury Trials and Elections

Macomb County Clerk Anthony G. Forlini is alarmed about recent discoveries regarding prospective 16th Judicial Circuit Court jurors. The jury "pool," based on the Secretary of State's driver's license database, includes non-citizens who are ineligible for jury duty.

"Non-citizens are coming through at an alarming rate. Our jury service summons are based on random draws from the driver's license bank. Frequently non-citizens slip through because citizenship was not flagged in the Secretary of State database," said Clerk Forlini.

Clerk Forlini became concerned as he directed his staff to check the Secretary of State's "Qualified Voter File" ("QVF") as it related to the individuals that were non-citizens in the jury pool. "I am in a unique position to see both the QVF file as well as the jury pool and to the best of my knowledge the first time someone did a cross check on the two databases."

"What we have found is very disturbing -- 239 non-citizens were found in the jury pool over a four-month period. In a cross check of our voter rolls it appears that 14 of these prospective jurors were registered to vote at some point in time. Our QVF shows instances where some of these non-citizens potentially having a voting history. One in particular appears to have voted several times, all of which could result in felony charges," said Clerk Forlini.

Currently, someone who applies for a driver's license automatically is registered to vote unless they choose to decline. If someone is presented with a voter registration form, there is a checkbox for citizenship. If the checkbox is checked "yes" for "I am a United States citizen," the form is processed even if the applicant is not a U.S. citizen or doesn't understand the question. Unlike some states, Michigan does not currently use a federal citizenship database or systematic federal verification to confirm the status at the time of registration.

"We must find a way for the Driver's License database to confirm citizenship. Many times there may be a language barrier, and applicants do not understand what they are signing. If this is not addressed, we risk compromising our jury trials and our elections," said Clerk Forlini.

"One possibility is to take advantage of new breakthroughs in linking several databases, where one database is able flag another database for actual citizenship verification."