

Roselle council president accused of ballot tampering

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ROSELLE -- The state Attorney General's office filed charges Wednesday against Roselle Council President Jamel Holley, accusing him of illegally filling out absentee ballots in a Democratic primary three years ago.

Holley, who had waived his right to a Grand Jury indictment, pleaded not guilty in Mercer County Superior Court on Thursday, according to his lawyer.



By Eliot

Caroom/New Jersey Local News Service Roselle Councilman Jamel Holley at a meeting last night.

The charge that Holley illegally filled out inner envelopes meant to safeguard the secrecy of voters' absentee ballots is a third-degree crime that would strip him of his office and could lead to up to five years in jail and a \$15,000 fine, the Attorney General's office said in a release.

"It is illegal under the absentee voting law to fill out any aspect of the ballot for the voter," said Peter Aseltine, a spokesman for the Attorney General. "That conduct is alleged as the basis for the charges filed today."

Holley, 29, Roselle's at-large councilman, is charged with filling out parts of ballots for at least 20 voters in the 2006 primary, according to a statement from the Attorney General's office.

In that campaign, Holley supported candidate Rosemarie Bullock. Ballots from the race were later thrown out by the Appellate Division of New Jersey Superior Court.

The New Jersey State Police Official Corruption Bureau investigated the case, the Attorney General's office said, and found that Holley filled out inner envelopes of the absentee ballots.

"The allegation against my client is nothing more than a procedural technicality," Holley's attorney, Melvin Wright, said Thursday.

Wright said that although third-degree crimes carry a heavy penalty, penalties would be less serious for anyone with a clean record.

"As a general rule, a person who is facing a third-degree offense who has no prior criminal convictions will only have to face a probationary sentence, or the person would not have to face any prison time," Wright said.

Roselle has been the setting for a spate of alleged election irregularities in the last few years.

The Holley charges come weeks after a Democratic candidate for Roselle's council, Marc Baltimore, was charged by the Union County Prosecutor's Office with attempting to vote twice in the same election.

In that June primary, absentee ballots hand-delivered by Mayor Garrett Smith were thrown out by the Board of Elections after hand-writing similarities came to the board's attention.

Wright said that the next court date for the case is on Oct. 9.

"It is our aim that this matter will be resolved swiftly and that Mr. Holley will continue in his capacity as councilman serving the constituents of Roselle," Wright said.

Holley, now 29, first won his at-large council seat in 2004. The Holley family is well-known in town.

His brother, Jesse Holley, was a standout athlete at Abraham Clark High School and recently appeared on Spike TV's "4th and Long," a football tryout reality show that he won, earning him a spot at the Dallas Cowboys' preseason camp.