

News of Record

TAX

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signatures through an Open Records Request at the time of its filing. Of the 88-page document, 86 were labeled, “We, the undersigned registered voters of LaRue County, Kentucky, petition for a recall election on the property tax rate of 57.2 cents per \$100 of property value adopted by the LaRue County Board of Education on September 4, 2025. This tax rate was set under KRS 160.470 and may be recalled under KRS 132.017.” Two of the pages, however, were different. They stated, “If you are a registered voter in LaRue County, please sign the petition to have a ballot vote to decide Yes and No to recall the TAX INCREASE. (Use one line per voter. Fill in all boxes.)”

The petition committee filed an appeal with the LaRue County Circuit Court the following week to challenge Metcalf’s decision. The civil suit identifies the Plaintiffs/Petitioners as Ragland, Manning and Bird as taxpayers, voters and members of the Petition Committee, represented by Adrienne Southworth, of Lawrenceburg. Defendants include Metcalf, in her official capacity as LaRue County Clerk, who is represented by Elizabethtown attorney Keith Bond and the Board of Education, represented by Grant Chenoweth, of Paintsville, and Hodgenville lawyers Tom Claycomb and Valerie McCubbin.

The basis of the appeal is that the committee disagrees with Metcalf’s interpretation of the law: they argue that questions affecting the right of taxpayers to petition for a recall of taxation must be “construed liberally” and that the difference in headings is a “technical problem” that should not cause the petition as a whole to be rejected. Attorneys for Metcalf and the Board disagree, contending that the law’s requirement for substantially uniform petition pages is not a procedural formality, but a “statutory safeguard designed to ensure that every signer sees the same textual heading and acts on the same understanding of what is being recalled.” The Board also filed a counterclaim, accusing committee members of misconduct during and after signature collection and Metcalf of improperly and erroneously verifying signatures.

All parties returned to the courtroom on Tuesday, Sept. 8 for the official trial. The question brought before Circuit Court Judge Charles C. Simms III was whether a recall tax petition that does not follow the state’s “substantially uniform” requirement can still be certified and declared sufficient.

Southworth began the trial by calling Metcalf to the witness stand and reviewing the 88-page petition with her. Including the supporting documents for each signature, the exhibit was more than 1,248 pages. The hours-long testimony, where Southworth and Metcalf went page by page determining the count of signatures approved and not, found a total of 820 verified signatures and 262 signatures not verified; the main reason for signatures not being verified included signatures not matching examples available to Metcalf and incomplete identifying information (using ditto marks instead

of writing an address, not correctly filling out birth date or not including a cell phone number). Southworth argued that signatures with ditto marks should have been verified if the address listed above the mark was the individual’s residence, as their intention was clear. She also said those who did not include a cell phone number should also be counted, as a phone number is not required under the statute.

During Metcalf’s cross-examination, Chenoweth objected to hundreds of signatures that had been verified. His primary complaint was that several addresses on the petition did not match voter card information presented by Metcalf. Metcalf stated that she had only provided the voter cards that depicted the individual’s signature, not necessarily the cards that had the most up-to-date address.

“When I did this, some people had 10 or 15 voter cards and I did not print all 10 or 15 voter cards for every person, just the one that had the signature,” Metcalf said. “I didn’t think that was needed, but if you would like all of those cards I can get them.”

After determining that the court had not been provided with all documentation used to verify the signatures, Chenoweth told Judge Simms that he did not believe the trial process could continue.

“We’re supposed to be reviewing the validity of the clerk’s determination, and they’re telling me there are documents they used that haven’t been shown to us and aren’t being shown to the court,” he said.

Simms noted Chenoweth’s objection but ultimately ruled that the trial would continue. In addition to the petition addresses that did not match voter cards, Chenoweth also argued against Metcalf’s verification of names that had been shortened or abbreviated (i.e., Mike or M. instead of Michael), middle names that had been signed as first names and several signatures which he contended were not similar to the provided examples.

Bond, Metcalf’s attorney, only asked her one question: “[Metcalf], did you and your staff do the best job you could do in an effort to make a determination regarding the content of the petition pages?” She answered yes.

Metcalf was on the stand for over 10 hours, with her testimony continuing throughout Tuesday and into Wednesday morning.

Southworth then called William Smith to the stand,

who stated he was a registered voter in LaRue County who had willingly signed the petition. Southworth used the state’s voter registration website to show the court that Smith was a registered voter.

Southworth rested her case after Smith’s testimony, though she reserved the right to call rebuttal witnesses due to the Board’s counterclaim.

The court recessed Wednesday morning between 10:30 a.m. and 1 p.m. due to Chenoweth’s witnesses, the three petition committee members, being absent from the trial and unavailable until that afternoon.

Jerry Bird was the first witness. While on the stand, Bird testified to his part in circulating the petition. He said that he allowed anyone to sign the petition, stating, “I would tell them, ‘I don’t care if you’re for or against it, I just want you to have a say on what they do ... if you want to put it on a ballot for the whole county to have a voice.’” Chenoweth alleged that Bird’s representation of the petition was misleading and could have caused someone who was for the tax to sign the petition, not realizing they didn’t have to; Bird disagreed with this depiction.

Bird admitted to giving pages to individuals who were not on the petition committee to gather signatures and helping some individuals fill out their information, though he made sure they always signed their name. He denied making any changes to the petition.

David Ragland, however, did admit to altering two signatures. The first was an instance where a husband and wife had both signed the petition, but the husband’s name was printed before her signature. Ragland said he reached out to the husband via text and changed the woman’s printed name based on the conversation with the husband. He also admitted to altering an entry where the signee had written the date of signing instead of their date of birth; Ragland could not confirm which entry this change had been made to.

Ragland also stated that he left petition pages at Fisher Auto Parts in Hodgenville, and regularly directed individuals there to sign the petition; although he admitted he was not present for every signature, Ragland stated that he kept a close eye on the pages and regularly checked in. He also left pages on his back porch for individuals to sign when he was unavailable.

Bill Manning informed Chenoweth that he had been injured near the beginning of the petition process and was not out with the others collecting signatures, though he did have individuals coming to his house to sign. He also stated that Oscar McGuffey picked up a petition page from his house, collected signatures and brought the page back to him.

All three men testified to the involvement of Dr. Gil Meyers in the petition process. Although he was not on the committee, Myers was reportedly the hub for the petition, with Bird and Ragland both stating that pages were regularly dropped off at his house before submission to the county clerk. Ragland also stated that the “overlay sheet” – which did not identify the LaRue County Board of Education nor the tax levy being challenged – that caused the petition to have two pages with different headings was created by Myers; Manning stated that he believed the sheet’s purpose was to clarify that the signer would need to be a registered voter in LaRue County, though he admitted the original sheet already said that. None of the men could identify where the two pages in question originated from.

The petition committee members also testified to the affidavit of the petition committee, which they filed with Metcalf prior to beginning the circulation process. Although the affidavit must be confirmed by an oath, carrying the legal weight as if speaking under oath in a courtroom, Bird and Ragland could not recall being under oath when they signed the document. Manning said he does remember being sworn in before signing but did not recall all three members of the committee being present when he did so.

During their cross-examination, Southworth asked all three men if they used the “overlay sheet” in an attempt to purposely hide, conceal or otherwise create a false appearance regarding the petition. Bird, Ragland and Manning all stated that doing so was never their intention, and all said that they actually rarely used the sheet to begin with.

Chenoweth’s last witness was LaRue County Schools Superintendent Adryanne Warren, who provided an understanding of the tax levy the petition attempted to recall – something the committee could not do. She also stated that she had witnessed Myers providing incorrect information regarding the tax at

Lincoln Days in 2025, invited him into her office to ensure he had correct information and then heard rumors that he was continuing to use the false information. Warren also said that she saw Myers with a petition page at Lincoln Days, though she did not see anyone sign it, and also saw a petition page at Hutcherson Auto Sales in Buffalo.

Southworth asked Warren to elaborate on what incorrect information Myers was spreading, to which she said that he was allegedly telling people that their property tax bills would increase by 11%. Warren said she, along with LCS Director of Finance Jessica Castenir, pulled Myers’ tax bill and walked him through how much his bill would cost with the new tax rate. Although she could not recall the exact percentage increase, Warren said she was positive it was less than 11%.

During closing arguments, Chenoweth argued that the entirety of the petition process was flawed, from the affidavit that started the petition committee but was potentially signed without the required oath and without all members present, to Metcalf’s certification process that he asserts verified signatures that should not have been approved. He argued that the petition committee substantially yielded control of the process to Myers, admitted to allowing others to circulate petition pages and also admitted to altering petition signatures.

“It was just a substantial failure of the petition committee to take the responsibility of circulating a petition in the community and ensure that it was presented to the clerk as a single uniform instrument that would have sufficiently verified the names to trigger a recall election,” Chenoweth said.

Southworth argued that the Board was asking the court to use a “beyond a reasonable doubt” standard to ascertain petition validity, while the law identifies what must be strictly complied with and what can be

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JAIL LOG

Bookings at The LaRue County Detention Center from Friday, Sept. 4 to Monday, Sept. 14.

- **Juan Tista Jeronimo**, of Madison, TN. Alcohol intoxication in a public place.
- **Stephen Hawkins**, 52 of Munfordville. Operating a motor vehicle under the influence of alcohol (second offense).
- **Kelcie Shanelle Hodge**, 32 of Louisville. Execution of a LaRue Co. complaint warrant for theft of identity of another without consent, giving officer false identifying information and fourth-degree assault (no visible injury).
- **River Gibson**, 25 of Louisville. Execution of a LaRue Co. bench warrant for failure to appear.

Note: The above information includes a weekly list of bookings into the LaRue County Detention Center. The individuals listed in the log have been arrested and charged with a crime. All individuals arrested are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty in a court of law.

FREE

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the town square (permit required, and will be strictly enforced).

Additionally, the rear parking lot of the high school will be closed for Band of Hawks practice and students painting parking space.

Festivalgoers are encouraged to use the adjacent LaRue County Middle School parking lots if the front lot of the high school fills up.

LINCOLN

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with prelim placements 5-9 performing from 6:45 p.m. with placements 6-9 set to compete starting at 8:15 p.m.

The host Band of Hawks will take the field at 9:30 p.m. for an exhibition performance of The Last Penny.

Lincoln Invitational is sponsored by Visit Hodgenville. Admission is \$10, with ages 5 and under free. Concessions will be available, with gates opening at 11:30 p.m.

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