

At public hearing, SEP presidential candidate Joe Kishore demanded that the undemocratic exclusion of West be rescinded

Michigan elections board places Cornel West back on the ballot

Jacob Crosse
26 August 2024

In a 3-1 decision, the Michigan Board of State Canvassers voted to place independent presidential candidate Cornel West on the ballot following a challenge from Democratic lawyers seeking to bar him.

Former chair of the Michigan Democratic Party, Mark Brewer, on behalf of Rosa Holliday, another Democratic Party operative, sought to block West from the ballot on the basis that circulator petition signatures had allegedly been forged.

The state Bureau of Elections had recommended West not be placed on the ballot over technical issues regarding his affidavit of identity not being properly notarized.

This past Saturday, Court of Claims Judge James Robert Redford overruled that recommendation, noting that West's campaign had submitted far more than the minimum number of signatures to be on the ballot and that presidential candidates are not even required in the state of Michigan to file an affidavit of identity.

Despite the judge's ruling, on Monday Democrats on the Michigan Board of State Canvassers were poised to vote to keep West off the ballot and readily accepted arguments put forward by Brewer that circulator's signatures had been "forged."

"The handwriting is so fundamentally different" Brewer argued, that "it had to be forged." Brewer did not actually provide any proof that any of the circulator signatures had been forged.

At the hearing, Michigan Elections Director Jonathan Brater testified that the West campaign submitted nearly 27,000 signatures, more than double the 12,000

minimum requirement. Brater said that a random sampling of 750 signatures submitted found that 448 were valid, well more than the 335 minimum threshold.

In regards to alleged forged circulator petition signatures, Brater observed that even if every single signature collected by circulators that were allegedly forged were removed from the test batch of 750 signatures, the West campaign would still have 27 signatures over the minimum threshold.

Despite this, Chair of the Board Mary Ellen Gurewitz, a Democratic Party operative, argued that West should be compelled to provide the board with more information regarding the circulators, including signatures of every circulator, even if they were not named in the challenge submitted by Brewer. "Candidates should have an obligation to do that," Gurewitz said.

Socialist Equality Party candidate for president Joseph Kishore spoke in defense of West's right to appear on the ballot at Monday's hearing, despite the political differences between the SEP and West. The board had earlier in the meeting certified Kishore to appear on the ballot in Michigan.

"I fully support the right of Cornel West to appear on the ballot and call on this body to vote to certify this result today," Kishore said. "Cornel West and his supporters have submitted over 26,000 signatures. Your own staff has ... recommended that you approve this decision. It has a confidence level of 99.9 percent.

"You are now talking about the possibility of imposing new requirements, new procedures for the

West campaign to submit in order to satisfy the requirements, as has been pointed out, at a very late stage in this process.”

“If such a decision is made,” Kishore said, “it is in fact an outrageous attack on the rights of West, on the rights of the voters of Michigan and on basic democratic rights.”

In his remarks, Kishore noted that “the requirements for independent candidates to get on the ballot in Michigan and other states throughout the United States are extremely onerous and undemocratic.”

While the “United States talks about defending democracy all over the world,” he said, “for independent candidates to get on the ballot ... requires often times tens of thousands, if not even more, signatures of registered voters.”

Kishore noted that even when those requirements are satisfied, “There are even further attempts to keep candidates off the ballot.” He noted as well that those seeking to keep West off the ballot were leading members of the Democratic Party, “That is, political opponents of Cornel West.”

The Democrats, Kishore said, “are discussing and seeking to prevent—and this is how it will be seen, I think correctly—their political opponents from being on the ballot so that the voters of Michigan are unable to vote for anyone besides the two candidates of the Democratic and Republican parties.”

Kishore observed what was at stake was not just the rights of West but of the basic right to vote: “People have the right to vote for candidates they want to vote for.”

Following Kishore’s comments, the board, consisting of two Democrats and two Republicans, voted to approve West, though Gurewitz voted against.

However, Brewer noted that he plans on filing an appeal to the previous court ruling, underscoring the fact that the Democrats are not going to relent on their efforts to block challenges to their ballot monopoly.

In a separate development in Georgia, administrative law judge Michael Malihi blocked Robert F. Kennedy Jr., West, the Green Party’s Jill Stein and Party for Socialism and Liberation’s candidate Claudia De la Cruz from appearing on the ballot despite the fact that all of the campaigns submitted more than the minimum 7,500 signatures to appear.

The decision to block the independent and third party candidates was made following a challenge by Democrats and Democratic Party-aligned groups, such as Clear Choice Action.

In making his decision, Malihi concurred with the Democrats’ arguments that the petitions filed by the campaigns were invalid because they included the names of the candidates themselves. Malihi, citing a 2017 law, argued that each campaign must file petitions containing not only 7,500 signatures, but the petitions must include the names of each of the 16 presidential electors in the state of Georgia.

“In Georgia,” Mahili wrote, “independent candidates do not themselves qualify for the office of President and Vice President of the United States. ... Rather, individuals seeking the office of presidential elector qualify for the ballot to have their candidate for President or Vice President placed on the ballot.”

All of the campaigns argued that this was not a correct interpretation of the law, as it would require each of the campaigns to submit 16 different filings each with 7,500 signatures, for a total of 120,000 each. In other words, the four campaigns would have had to submit nearly half a million signatures, or roughly 5 percent of the total population of Georgia.

The final decision to keep the candidates on or off the ballot must be made by Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger before September 17, as that is when Georgia begins sending out absentee and overseas ballots to military members. RFK Jr. is not challenging the decision and is encouraging his supporters to vote for Trump in Georgia.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact