

Missouri attorney general calls for ICE investigation of signature-gathering on behalf of anti-gerrymander referendum

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Missouri Attorney General Catherine Hanaway has taken the extraordinary step of referring Advanced Micro Targeting (AMT) to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), claiming—without evidence—that the canvassing firm was “employing illegal aliens in their efforts to undermine the will of the people’s elected representatives.” AMT was hired on behalf of the statewide referendum campaign against House Bill 1, an aggressively partisan redistricting plan designed to lock in a 7–1 Republican congressional map by eliminating the Kansas City-based district currently held by Democrat Emanuel Cleaver.

Under Missouri’s constitution, citizens can suspend a newly enacted law by gathering signatures for a referendum. Hanaway’s threat to involve ICE is part of a multi-pronged effort by Republican officials in Missouri to prevent voters from exercising their constitutional right to challenge the state’s new gerrymander. Backers of the referendum have until December 11 to gather the required 106,000 signatures across six of the state’s eight Congressional districts. Organizers already claim to have gathered over 200,000.

AMT president Billy Rogers responded to Hanaway, denying the accusations. Rogers said, “We’ve qualified more statewide initiatives for the ballot than any other firm in the country since 2020. We only have employees. We don’t use independent contractors. And because we use employees, everyone we hire goes through E-Verify.” He continued, “If we hear from the attorney general’s office or any other government agency, they want to take a look at our employee records and talk to us about our process, we’d be glad to talk to them. We do it right. We follow

the law.”

On Tuesday, November 25, the Republican National Committee (RNC) sent mass texts to residents in Kansas City and elsewhere in the state discouraging people from signing any petitions they might encounter during Black Friday shopping.

Hanaway previously filed a federal lawsuit to block the referendum on the ground that the Missouri constitution does not explicitly authorize it, as redistricting is required by the US Constitution. Chuck Hatfield, an attorney for People not Politicians, which is organizing the petition drive, noted the state constitution states the people “reserve the power to reject laws and reserve the power to approve or reject referendums of any act of the General Assembly.”

In the course of the lawsuit, Hanaway and Missouri Solicitor General Louis Capozzi argued that the map enshrined in House Bill 1 should be preserved because the previous map, which included Cleaver’s Kansas City seat, was an unconstitutional racial gerrymander. The reasoning put forward by Hanaway and Capozzi anticipates a decision by the US Supreme Court on a redistricting case in Louisiana that could gut or overturn the Voting Rights Act.

A lawsuit filed on November 24 by AMT has exposed an even deeper layer of interference in the referendum campaign. AMT alleges that four out-of-state political consulting firms carried out a coordinated effort to sabotage the petition drive from within. According to the complaint, operatives approached AMT employees with offers of \$20,000 and \$30,000 to quit the campaign, turn over proprietary signature lists, hand over internal productivity data, and provide “intelligence-gathering” services to the opposition.

Twenty-eight workers were allegedly “poached,” and sensitive strategy documents were stolen.

Rogers said in relation to the actions of the four companies, “This was so egregious. We’ve never seen anything like this.”

The breathtaking level of interference in the referendum campaign in Missouri is a result of the deep unpopularity of the Trump administration’s policies and its desperation to avoid losing the narrow Republican majority in the US House of Representatives.

The Democratic Party, integrated into the same capitalist framework and committed to preserving the same institutions, has limited its opposition to lawsuits and retaliatory gerrymandering in states like California where it has control of the political machinery.

It has consistently refused to make any appeal to the population against the Trump-led attacks on democratic rights, as it fears any popular mobilization would quickly escalate beyond its control and threaten the capitalist system as a whole.

The working class cannot defend its democratic rights by appealing to the very institutions that are attacking them. The attack on immigrants, the weaponization of ballot language, the manipulation of referenda, the ICE intimidation campaign, and the covert sabotage of the signature-gathering effort reveal a political order that is no longer compatible with even the most elementary forms of democracy.

The defense of democratic rights requires the mobilization of the working class as an independent political force. It must build rank-and-file committees in workplaces, neighborhoods, and schools—organs of struggle capable of unifying workers across all divisions and preparing a counteroffensive against the assault on social and democratic rights. These committees must be guided by a clear political program: the rejection of both corporate parties, the fight against war and austerity, and the struggle for workers power.

Nothing will be defended unless the working class takes conscious control of its own movement. The sabotage unfolding in Missouri is part of a broader international process in which democratic forms are collapsing under the weight of inequality, militarism and oligarchic rule. The way forward lies in expanding the fight now emerging—transforming scattered

opposition into a unified, international movement of the working class to take political power and reorganize society on the basis of social need, not private profit.



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