

4 Democratic judicial candidates withdraw from Harris County primary after ballot challenge

By [John Lomax V](#), [Nicole Hensley](#), Staff Writer Jan 5, 2026



The Harris County Criminal Justice Center, 1201 Franklin St., left, and the Harris County Civil Courthouse, 201 Caroline St., are shown Wednesday, Sept. 25, 2024, in Houston.

Melissa Phillip/Staff Photographer

Four judicial candidates withdrew from their 2026 election bids after incumbent judges and other Democratic opponents filed lawsuits alleging their candidacy filings contained forged signatures and other irregularities.

Allison Mathis, a candidate for the 180th District Court; Anna Eady, a candidate for Harris County Criminal Court at Law No. 3; Angela Reese McKinnon, a candidate for 295th District Court; and Velda Faulkner, running for the 190th District Court, all withdrew from their races last week, Harris County Democratic Party Chair Mike Doyle said.

A judge on Monday ordered the removal of three candidates from the ballot.

While the challenges levied against Faulkner and McKinnon were largely built on procedural issues — including, in Faulkner's case, failing to list the name of the office she sought on her original filing — those brought against Mathis and Eady alleged the pair's election filings contained signatures that were

"forgeries or fraudulent," according to Eady's opponent, defense attorney Carlos Aguayo, in his complaint against the Harris County Democratic Party.

Mathis and Eady used the same worker to collect signatures to file their candidacy, records show. Mathis, a criminal defense attorney, stood by the circulator's work.

"The allegations are unproven, unsubstantiated and I feel like this is an example of why people get disgusted with politics," Mathis said. "I think when there's Democratic in-fighting, it gives Republican arm strength to say these elections are unfair and that's not true."

Mathis withdrew from the race to avoid potentially exorbitant legal costs in fighting off her primary challenger, Stephanie Morales, in the courts.

"My choice was to start litigating this — I'm not a civil litigator — with an elections law attorney who charges \$400 an hour," said Mathis, who is not a party in the challenge. "The timelines on these are so fast ... I would need to get an attorney and start employing them around the clock."

Eady, also in private practice, could not be reached for comment.

The complaints from Aguayo and Morales, who hired the same lawyer to file similar pleadings, alleged Jaivan Smith, a signature collector for judicial candidates seeking a place on the primary ballot, personally forged dozens of signatures on behalf of both Eady and Mathis. Complaints challenging the filings noted alleged similarities between Smith's handwriting and that of dozens of purported residents who pledged their support for the Democrats.

"The petition pages circulated by Jaivan Smith exhibit massive systematic handwriting irregularities, including near identical letter formation, slant and stroke patterns across multiple signed entries appearing on the same petition pages," read the complaints. "These observable similarities ... strain credulity as to whether each purported signatory personally affixed his or her own signature."

Candidates seeking a place on the ballot for judicial positions in major Texas counties, such as Harris and Bexar counties, are required to gather signatures from a minimum of 250 eligible voters in addition to paying a filing fee, according to the Texas Secretary of State's website. Otherwise, candidates must collect triple that to forgo the filing fee.

Some signature collectors, also known as circulators, for judicial candidates may gather support from people at political party events or from shoppers at grocery stores.

Nancy Sims, a politics lecturer at the University of Houston, said candidates are responsible for double-checking their petitions.

"They should make sure their own petitions are clean before they submit them," Sims said. "Many people over collect signatures. They collect far more than required that way if some are fraudulent. You can't help that because you have to rely on what people tell you when they sign the petition."

Although signature challenges have happened in the past, she noted an increase in competition among this year's Democratic primary that could have prompted the heightened scrutiny. Nearly three dozen lawyers are vying for 14 contested judicial primaries.

"The more competitive the race, the more likely you're going see people checking the finest details," Sims said.

Oliver Brown, an attorney who specializes in elections law, characterized election challenges as a costly business that some candidates can't afford. He represented former Judge DaSean Jones, [who raised funds for an election contest](#) that produced more than 100,000 documents as evidence as the case escalated to an appellate court.

The years-long court battle cost Jones well into six figures — although a final dollar amount was never specified and Brown would not disclose. Jones later resigned, allowing Gov. Greg Abbott to appoint his Republican opponent in his place.

"What's a shame is these incumbents are going through people's paperwork so they don't have to have a primary — which means you're not letting the people decide," Brown said.