

Sanchez, Rodzandra (COE)

From: Diaz-Greco, Gilma M. (COE)
Sent: Thursday, December 07, 2017 10:11 AM
To: Sanchez, Rodzandra (COE)
Subject: Robert Meyers, Esq., Weiss Serota Helfman Cole Bierman, P.L. (Residency, Citizens'Bill of Rights (A)(2)) INQ 17-276
Attachments: Residency DE 16-01.pdf

[INQ 17-276 Meyers](#)

From: Centorino, Joseph (COE)
Sent: Tuesday, December 05, 2017 5:16 PM
To: 'Robert Meyers' <RMeyers@wsh-law.com>
Cc: Turay, Radia (COE) <Radia.Turay@miamidade.gov>; Perez, Martha D. (COE) <Martha.Perez2@miamidade.gov>; Diaz-Greco, Gilma M. (COE) <Gilma.Diaz-Greco@miamidade.gov>
Subject: INQ 17-276 Robert Meyers, Esq., Weiss Serota Helfman Cole Bierman, P.L. (Residency, Citizens'Bill of Rights (A)(2))

Robert,

You requested that I provide some guidance in connection with a residency issue that has come up in regard to a member of a municipal board in one of the municipalities represented by your firm. I understand that the individual involved has more than one possible residence, one of which is in the municipality and the other outside of the municipality. It is possible that there are indicia that the residence outside the municipality is a primary residence, such as would be case in a homestead property. The individual does have ties to the residence within the municipality, although it was not clear to me exactly what those ties are. It is a requirement that a member of the board in question be a "resident" of the municipality. If such an individual were to provide false information regarding residency, it could be a violation of the Miami-Dade County Citizens' Bill of Rights, Section (A)(2), as well as other applicable statutes and ordinances.

The issue of residency is one that is often raised locally and which has been the source of controversy and confusion, especially in connection with political candidates, public officeholders and electors. I think that the residency issue you describe is analogous enough to those situations that a similar analysis would apply to the issue. There is no prohibition against persons having more than one residence, and it is fairly well established that one may vote, run for, or hold a public office from any bona fide legal residence, unless there is some further local requirement that the residence be a primary or exclusive one, which I understand is not the case in the situation you inquired about.

The issue is fairly summed up in a Florida Division of Elections opinion, DE 16-01, that includes legal citations and analysis on the issue (see attached). The issue of legal residency boils down to whether there is "a good faith intention" to reside in a particular place, together with "overt acts" that demonstrate that intention. The overt acts could involve various things associated with residency, such as voter registration, vehicle registration, receiving mail, paying for telephone or utility service at the residence. Obviously, the use of the residence by the individual and the individual's presence on the premises are important indicia. This situation should be evaluated in terms of such indicia as well as an assessment of the good faith intent of the individual to utilize the premises as a residence and not for some deceptive or fraudulent purpose.

I hope this is helpful.

Joe

Joseph M. Centorino

Executive Director and General Counsel
Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust
19 W. Flagler Street, Suite 820
Miami, FL 33130
Tel: (305) 579-2594
Fax: (305) 579-0273
ethics.miamidade.gov





FLORIDA DEPARTMENT *of* STATE

RICK SCOTT
Governor

KEN DETZNER
Secretary of State

January 4, 2016

The Honorable Charles L. Overturf, III
Supervisor of Elections, Putnam County
2509 Crill Avenue, Suite 900
Palatka, Florida 32177

Re: DE 16-01 Residency—
Establishing Residency—§§ 97.041,
97.051, 98.045, 98.065, and 98.075,
Florida Statutes

Dear Supervisor Overturf:

As the supervisor of elections for Putnam County, Florida, you have requested an advisory opinion from the Division of Elections regarding whether a person may legally register to vote in Putnam County even though he claims a homestead exemption in a different county. As the supervisor of elections, you have a statutory duty under sections 98.045, 98.065, and 98.075, Florida Statutes, to determine the eligibility of voter registration applicants and registered electors. Accordingly, the Division has the authority to issue you an advisory opinion pursuant to section 106.23(2), Florida Statutes.

FACTS

You write in your request that you are aware of a person who desires to register to vote in Putnam County. You state that this person has been a “resident” in Putnam County “since childhood,” and that he has owned a house in Putnam County for about 30 years and is active in the community. This person owns another house in St. Johns County, where he claims homestead exemption pursuant to Florida law. You ask whether the person is legally permitted to register to vote in Putnam County.

ANALYSIS

Florida law requires that in order to register to vote in a particular county, the voter must first be a “legal resident” of that county. *See* § 97.041(1)(a)4., Fla. Stat. (2015). “Legal resident” and “legal residence” are not defined in the Florida Election Code, but the Florida Supreme Court

Division of Elections

R.A. Gray Building, Suite 316 • 500 South Bronough Street • Tallahassee, Florida 32399
850.245.6200 • 850.245.6217 (Fax) • DOS.MyFlorida.com/elections



has indicated that the term “legal residence” has two components—both intention and fact. *See Bloomfield v. City of St. Petersburg Beach*, 82 So. 2d 364, 368 (Fla. 1955). In other words, to establish legal residence, a person must have a “good faith intention” to reside in a particular place, coupled with “positive overt acts” that demonstrate that intention. *See id.* Such “overt acts” could include the person buying a home in the county, applying for homestead in the county, registering his or her vehicle in the county, receiving mail at an address in the county, or undertaking any other activity normally associated with home life. *Cf. id.* (indicating that factors to examine when determining where a person has legal residence include where the person’s vehicle is registered, where the person’s family resides, and where the person calls “home,” among other factors); *Div. of Elections Op. 93-05* (June 23, 1993) (listing more factors). Thus, the determination of legal residence is fact-intensive and turns on the particular circumstances of each individual case. *See id.* at 369 (“[E]stablishment of one’s residence will usually depend on a variety of acts or declarations all of which must be weighed in the particular case as evidence would be weighed upon any other subject”). A person can only have *one* “legal residence.” *See Walker v. Harris*, 398 So. 2d 955, 958 (Fla. 4th DCA 1981).

Generally, each voter registration applicant must decide whether he or she is truly a legal resident of the county where voter registration status is sought.¹ *See* § 97.051, Fla. Stat. (requiring the voter applicant to subscribe to an oath upon registering, which, among other things, requires the applicant to swear that he or she is “qualified as an elector under the Constitution and laws of the State of Florida . . .”); *see also* § 97.041(1)(a), Fla. Stat. (providing various requirements for registering to vote, including the requirement that the applicant must be “a legal resident of the county in which that person seeks to be registered” and a “legal resident of the State of Florida”). When the voter registration applicant takes the oath upon registering, that voter is solemnly declaring that he or she is a legal resident of the county.² *See id.*

¹ Though the voter registration applicant bears the responsibility for ensuring that he or she is a legal resident of the county where the applicant seeks to register, the supervisor also bears various legal responsibilities to ensure that voters are registered at the proper locations. *See, e.g.,* § 98.045(1), Fla. Stat. (providing that the supervisor “shall determine whether a voter registration applicant is ineligible” based on the fact that “[t]he applicant has provided an address of legal residence that is not his or her legal residence”); § 98.065(2), Fla. Stat. (requiring the supervisor to conduct a biennial registration list maintenance program); § 98.065(4)(a), Fla. Stat. (in certain circumstances requiring the supervisor, if he or she receives information indicating a voter’s address has changed, to change the registration records and send the voter an address change notice); § 98.075(6), Fla. Stat. (requiring the supervisor, if he or she receives certain information indicating “that a registered voter is ineligible because he or she . . . has listed a residence that is not his or her legal residence,” to begin procedures for removal pursuant to law).

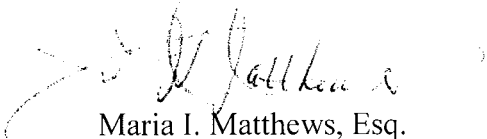
² Any person who willfully and falsely swears in relation to voting or who willfully submits false voter registration information commits a third-degree felony under Florida law. *See* § 104.011, Fla. Stat.

The facts at hand, while not necessarily conclusive, are at least indicative of the applicant's intent to make Putnam County his legal residence. The applicant ultimately must determine for himself whether he can truthfully declare that he is a "legal resident" of Putnam County (in lieu of any other county) at the time he subscribes to the voter registration oath contained in section 97.051. Such declaration must be based upon his good faith *intention* to be a resident of Putnam County, and based upon his *overt actions* that demonstrate that intent (such as being involved in the community, owning a home in Putnam County for 30 years, and taking other actions showing that Putnam County is legitimately his home).³ His claim of homestead exemption in another county, alone, is not dispositive in the other direction. Suffice it to say, a supervisor is not required to resolve factual disputes in the face of evidence supporting possible legal residence in two different counties. Based on the facts you have presented and the evidence available to you, it is the opinion of the Division that if the voter registration applicant swears or affirms on his application that he legally resides in Putnam County, you may legally perform your duty as supervisor to register him to vote in Putnam County.

SUMMARY

A person may only be registered to vote in the county where the person has his or her "legal residence." The term "legal residence" means the place where the person both truly intends to reside and has made overt acts that demonstrate that intention. If the supervisor of elections becomes aware of information that points to a person's legal residence being outside the county of prospective registration, as long as the supervisor is aware of evidence that supports a person's claim of legal residence *within* the county, the supervisor may register the person to vote. A supervisor is not required to resolve factual disputes in the face of evidence supporting legal residence in two different counties.

Respectfully,



Maria I. Matthews, Esq.
Director, Division of Elections

³ Issues involving homestead law fall outside the Florida Election Code. *See, e.g.*, art. X, § 4, Fla. Const. Therefore, the Division has no authority to comment on the legality of the registrant claiming his homestead exemption in St. Johns County. *But see Rosenthal v. Esquinaldo*, 443 So. 2d 281 (Fla. 3d DCA 1983) (even though a person had claimed homestead in Dade County, he was a qualified elector of Monroe County).