

## Green Party presidential nominee sues for access to the ballot in Oklahoma

By BRIANNA BAILEY | JULY 30, 2020

**O**klahoma requires a \$35,000 filing fee or signatures from 2 percent of registered voters for alternative presidential candidates, laws Howie Hawkins says are designed to keep him off the ballot.

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*Howie Hawkins, the Green Party's 2020 presidential nominee. Courtesy*

**G**reen Party Presidential Nominee Howie Hawkins is suing Oklahoma election officials over what he claims are unreasonable deadlines and filing fees in the state that have blocked him and other alternative candidates from securing their names on the November ballot.

Hawkins filed the lawsuit against the Oklahoma State Election Board on July 15 in federal court in Oklahoma City.

In an interview with *The Frontier*, Hawkins said he's suing on behalf of all independent and third-party candidates to gain easier access to the ballot in Oklahoma.

Hawkins is an environmental activist from New York and cofounder of the Green Party of the United States.

"There are a number of independent and alternative party candidates who are serious," he said. "They are offering platforms that differ from the Democrats and Republicans. And the voters of Oklahoma should have all the options on the ballot. It's only fair to them."

Oklahoma law requires presidential candidates who are independent or from an unrecognized political party to collect signatures from 2 percent of registered voters, or pay an alternative \$35,000 filing fee.

Hawkins said he believes the fee is excessive and designed to keep him and other alternative candidates off the ballot.

Three independent presidential candidates have opted to pay the filing fee in order to appear on the November ballot in Oklahoma, including rapper **Kayne West**, former child actor and Bitcoin investor **Brock Pierce**, and classical pianist **Jade Simmons**.

The state currently only recognizes candidates from the Democratic, Republican and Libertarian parties. Oklahoma also does not give voters the option to write-in the names of alternative candidates.

**In 2016, Green Party presidential nominee Jill Stein and the progressive candidate Rocky De La Fuente unsuccessfully sued for access to the Oklahoma ballot on similar grounds.**

After the lawsuit, the state enacted a series of laws in 2017 that eased signature requirements for alternative candidates from 4 percent of registered voters to 2 percent and also added the alternative option of paying a \$35,000 fee.

In contrast, the filing fee for candidates running for U.S. Senate in Oklahoma is just \$2,000, Hawkins' lawsuit points out.

The coronavirus pandemic has also strained Green Party's ability to gather signatures in order to get Hawkins' name on the ballot in several states. In Oklahoma, Hawkins would have had to gather 35,592 signatures and file a statement of candidacy by July 15 in order to meet the current requirements.

Hawkins is now on the ballot in 24 states and is running as a write-in candidate in Indiana.

"This has been very hard on them," said James Linger, the Tulsa attorney who is representing Hawkins in the lawsuit. "There's just a limit in what you can do."

Other petition efforts in the state have also been halted by the virus. An initiative petition effort aimed at getting a question on the November ballot to reform the state's political redistricting process was withdrawn earlier this month. Organizers blamed delays caused by litigation and the coronavirus **that made it difficult to meet the deadline to get the measure on the ballot.**

The Oklahoma State Election Board declined to comment on the pending litigation. Attorney General Mike Hunter's office said it was reviewing the lawsuit.

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Brianna Bailey

Brianna Bailey grew up in Idaho. Oklahoma is her adopted home. Bailey has covered issues ranging from Oklahoma's strained child welfare system to the slow decline of Oklahoma's rural hospitals. She has walked all the way across Oklahoma City twice, once north-to south via Western Avenue and once via the old U.S. Route 66. Her hobbies are baking and crashing meetings she isn't invited to attend. She holds a bachelor's degree in journalism from The University of Oklahoma. Email her at [brianna@readfrontier.com](mailto:brianna@readfrontier.com)

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