

couraged local residents to speak out against the invitation extended by a civil rights group.

Farrakhan is scheduled to speak Sept. 7 in Selma following a request by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which is sponsoring a "Unity Within" rally.

the overwhelming majority of the Muslim population of the United States are white.

"(Farrakhan's visit) will only fuel the fire of racial hatred in the Muslim community," said Sewell, whose remarks mirrored those of her fellow council member, Yusuf Abdus-

that it about the U.S. DISTRICT COURT WIDE OF ALABAMA ago. F ism a

2 plead guilty to rigging ballots

By Malcomb Daniels
ADVERTISER STAFF WRITER

A Wilcox County mother and daughter pleaded guilty Monday to rigging absentee ballots during a 1994 Wilcox County Commission race.

Johnita Mason, 25, of Pine Hill and Doris Mason, 43, her mother, pleaded guilty to illegal absentee voting in a race between Wilcox County Commissioner David Wright and Reginald Southall, said Alabama Attorney General Bill Pryor.

Johnita Mason pleaded guilty to five counts of illegal absentee voting. Doris Mason, also of Pine Hill, confessed to one count.

Both women were sentenced to 12-month suspended prison sentences and ordered to serve 2 years on probation.

The two guilty pleas are the first convictions gained from the attorney general's office's investigation into fraud during the 1994 election.

"This, I think, sends a strong message that we're not going to tolerate the stealing of elections in Alabama," Pryor said.

Johnita Mason, Doris Mason and Brady Mendenhall, 25, were indicted in 1996 following an investigation into an election in which Southall, a write-in candidate, received nearly 600 absentee votes to defeat Wright by 11 votes for a seat on the Wilcox County Commission. Southall received only 34 votes at the voting precincts.

Wright, who had defeated Southall in the Democratic primary, challenged the 1994 election in court. Wright took office in 1996 after Southall agreed to step down.

During a trial on Wright's challenge, handwriting experts testified that the handwriting on the 597 absentee ballots received by Southall belonged to as few as six people.



From left, Marengo County Commissioner and Assistant District Attorney W about problems in the Sheriff's Depa

Sheriff ask

By Alvin Benn
MONTGOMERY ADVERTISER

LINDEN — Calling him "an embarrassment," three Marengo County commissioners asked Sheriff Roger Davis on Monday to resign in the wake of federal extortion charges against him.

Commission Chairman Charles Moore joined Commissioners Freddie Armstead and Elmer Pruitt outside the county courthouse to issue a personal call for Davis to step down.

"(Davis) is a completely a him," commi FBI Friday payoff an wh compa sheriff to forc band to of bail outside the county courthouse to two yea Davis: rengo

Jewish fan

DEFENDANT'S
EXHIBIT
181

Charges were dropped Monday against Mendenhall in Wilcox County after a state handwriting expert determined that Mendenhall's handwriting did not match handwriting on the ballots, Pryor said.

Evidence in the case showed that Johnita Mason and Doris Mason gathered information from friends and relatives in the Arlington community, Pryor said.

The information was used to fill out affidavits for absentee ballots, authorities say. The friends and relatives thought they were legitimately getting ballots, Pryor said.

The guilty pleas from Johnita Mason and Doris Mason end the attorney general's investigation into voter fraud in Wilcox County for the 1994 election, Pryor said.

Next month, the attorney general's office and the U.S. attorney's office in Birmingham are scheduled to prosecute a voter fraud case out of Greene County.

The attorney general's office also has pending voter fraud cases in Hale County.

The 1996 election did not produce as many instances of voter fraud, but the attorney general's office plans to continue investigating complaints it receives, Pryor said.

"There's been a tremendous outcry for prosecutions in this area," Pryor said.

practices in Pike school

■ Response: Superintendent John Key denies there is an effort to harass the family's children

By Jay Reeves
ASSOCIATED PRESS

BRUNDIDGE — It's tough being the only Jewish kids in Pike County's public schools, a family says.

Assemblies include Christian prayers and scripture readings. The Gideons give New Testament Bibles to fifth graders in class. When disruptive, a Jewish student is told to write an essay titled "Why Jesus loves me."

Visitors in the system's main office can read from either of two Bibles displayed in the reception area, and preachers sometimes are invited to make school-wide addresses on topics like morals and decision-making.

"One of the times the ministers came in and said I was going to hell because I was not a Christian. I felt scared to admit I was Jewish

to anyone," said Sarah Herring, 11.

No one has ever questioned this commingling of religion and public education. Despite decades of court rulings erecting barriers between church and the classroom, it has always been that way in this rural, overwhelmingly Protestant area.

But always may be near an end.

The only Jewish family in this southeast Alabama system of 2,600 students claims in a federal lawsuit filed this month that school-sanctioned Christianity has led to continual harassment of their three oldest children.

Educators have forced the children to bow their heads during Christian prayers, and some talked openly of converting them to Christianity, contends the suit, filed by the American Civil Liberties Union.

Students have drawn swastikas on the Jewish children's lockers and book bags, the family claims, and the two boys have been beaten, mocked and wrongly punished. Classmates even played keep-away with their yarmulkes, the suit contends.

"Had there been a handicapped student in that school in a wheelchair, that kind of teasing would

not be tolerated," said Way is, stepfather of Paul Herring, 13; and Sarah's youngest daughter, 5-year-old Willis, entered kindergarten this year.

Superintendent John Key there is an organized effort to harass the Herring children, said many minor incidents have been "embellished beyond" by Willis and his wife, Sue.

Willis, a logging truck driver, moved from Seattle, Wash. County with his family in search of work. Mrs. Willis raised Jewish in Kentucky. Willis wants to formally convert to Judaism.

"The depiction of us as a bunch of neo-Nazi skinheads is just not accurate," said Key, 48, for 18 years.

Yet Key confirms many allegations in the lawsuit, which is not money but an order enjoining religious practices in the school.

The superintendent agreed after an assistant principal asked Herring to write an essay titled "Jesus loves me" for di-

Please turn to JEW

COMING WEDNESDAY: Historic Lowndes County school forms partnership