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Group asks judge to force Missouri secretary of state to decide on redistricting referendum

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Jason Rosenbaum / St. Louis Public Radio

Secretary of State Denny Hoskins welcomes candidates who filed for office in Jefferson City on Feb. 24. The group behind a redistricting referendum filed a lawsuit on Monday asking a judge to force Hoskins to decide on whether it will make the November 2026 ballot.

Secretary of State Denny Hoskins is facing another lawsuit over a congressional map passed in 2025.

People Not Politicians Executive Director Richard von Glahn filed suit on Monday in Cole County Court to force Hoskins to either accept or reject the group's referendum on the new congressional lines. He also wants a Cole County judge to stop Hoskins and Attorney General Catherine Hanaway from mandating that local elections officials implement the map aimed at ousting Democratic Congressman Emanuel Cleaver.

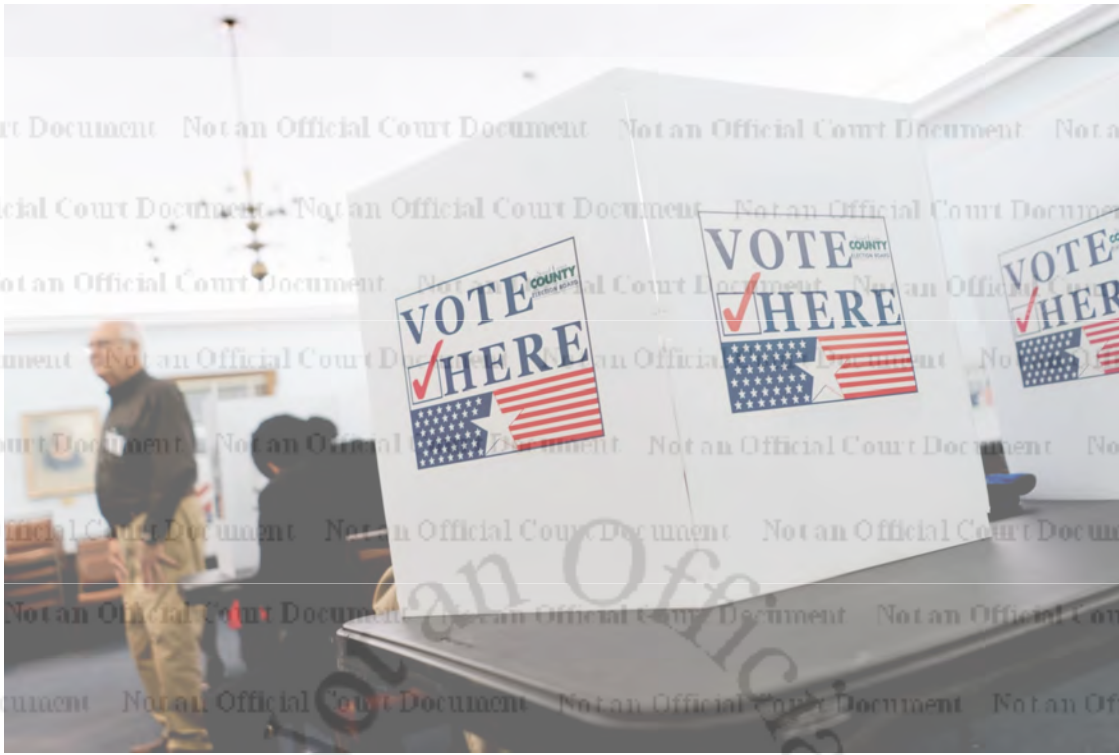
"Because Defendant Hoskins has abdicated his duties, Plaintiffs bring this suit to force him to do them, ensure that Plaintiff von Glahn and countless other Missourians are able to cast legal votes in the correct congressional districts, and restore sanity and decorum to Missouri's electoral process," the lawsuit states.

The suit is, in some respects, part of the aftermath of a unanimous Missouri Supreme Court decision in another lawsuit that the submission of signatures from People Not Politicians didn't automatically suspend the new map. Hoskins told reporters that he plans to wait until late July or early August to decide on the referendum.

But von Glahn is asking a judge to make Hoskins accept or reject the referendum immediately, especially since he's already filed federal court documents and made public statements that he thinks that a redistricting referendum is unconstitutional.

"We're still doing some research," Hoskins said last Friday. "I do have some constitutionality concerns that ... the referendum was never meant for congressional redistricting."

If Hoskins rejects the referendum now, the lawsuit states, it would give von Glahn adequate time to appeal the decision — and, perhaps, provide certainty for the state's elections officials.



Brian Munoz / St. Louis Public Radio

Voters take to the polls at Ladue City Hall in Ladue in the early morning on Nov. 8, 2022, for midterm elections.

Suit asks for an end to 'bullying' elections officials

The suit also wants a judge to prevent Hoskins and Hanaway from making local elections officials implement the 2025 map. That stems from a letter Boone County Clerk Brianna Lennon sent to Hoskins saying her residents would vote under a map lawmakers approved in 2022 until he decides on the referendum.

In response, Hanaway and Hoskins have blasted Lennon — and said that she may face civil or criminal legal action.

"I think obviously there will be a lot of legal lawsuits, including some probably from the attorney general's office, maybe from the Department of Justice, if she decides to defy the Supreme Court order, defy the opinion from the attorney general and defy direction from the chief election officer," Hoskins said last Friday.

But the filing notes that the Missouri Supreme Court decision doesn't say anything about elections officials being required to implement the 2025 map. It also points to part of Missouri Supreme Court Judge Ginger Gooch's decision specifying that because Hoskins hasn't made a decision on whether to accept or reject the referendum, "it is impossible to say as of this opinion" if People Not Politicians' filing of signatures triggered the suspension of the 2025 map.

And von Glahn's lawsuit goes on to say that Hanaway and Hoskins are "attempting to bully and intimidate local election officials into implementing congressional districts that — per the Missouri Supreme Court's opinion and the evidence — should be deemed suspended as of December 9, 2025."

"Because it is impossible to know whether HB 1 is the law, it is not lawful for Defendant Hoskins to direct that it be used to conduct the primary elections for Congress," the lawsuit states.

A spokeswoman for Hoskins said the Republican official is reviewing the lawsuit along with lawyers from the attorney general's office.

Hanaway spokeswoman Stephanie Whitaker said in a statement that the lawsuit "re-litigates the exact same questions the Missouri Supreme Court just decided."

"We look forward to prevailing in court," Whitaker said.

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