

# Petition problems threaten 2 GOP candidates

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Rep. Sharon Clahchischilliage, R-Kirtland

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SANTA FE – Two Republican members of the state House face legal challenges aimed at keeping them off the ballot – one because of a handwritten middle initial on petition paperwork, the other because of a misspelled name.

State Reps. Sharon Clahchischilliage of Kirtland and Kelly Fajardo of Belen, in turn, say voters should determine whether they remain in office, not a technicality decided in court.

“This is ridiculous,” Clahchischilliage said in an interview.

She faces a lawsuit that alleges she improperly altered the header of petitions used to gather signatures for her campaign – by adding the middle initial “E.” to her name.

Clahchischilliage said the rest of her name was typed on the petition, but she added her middle initial to ensure the paperwork matched her voter registration card.

Fajardo faces a challenge because some of the headers on her petition misspelled her name as “Fajado.”



Rep. Kelly Fajardo, R-Belen

“The special interests haven’t been able to beat me at the ballot box, so now they are trying to take the choice away from the voters of House District 7,” Fajardo said in a written statement.

A voter in each representative’s district filed the complaints. Karen Mendenhall, an Albuquerque attorney, filed the challenges on their behalf.

The Journal wasn’t able to reach her late Monday.

Each lawsuit points out that state law prohibits altering the header on petitions used to gather voter signatures, citing previous court decisions.

Ryan Cangiolosi, chairman of state Republican Party, accused Democrats of “targeting multiple outstanding female leaders with underhanded, partisan moves that would rob voters of the ability to cast their ballots for their preferred candidates.”

At least three Democrats face petition challenges of some kind, too, though the nature of the complaints wasn’t immediately available.

Angel Peña, a Democratic candidate in the 2nd Congressional District, suspended his campaign earlier this year after losing a legal challenge that hinged in part on changes made to some of his petitions. Campaign volunteers had trouble printing the letter “ñ” and wrote it in by hand.