

STATE OF MINNESOTA
COUNTY OF RAMSEY

DISTRICT COURT
SECOND JUDICIAL DISTRICT

Case Type: Other Civil/Misc.

Robin Peterson, Mark Feldman, and Jeffery
Thompson,

Court File No.: 62-CV-20-5600

Contestants,

v.

Steve Simon, only in his official capacity as
the Minnesota Secretary of State, and Dean
Phillips, Congressional candidate,

Contestees.

**MEMORANDUM OF LAW IN SUPPORT OF CONTESTEE DEAN PHILLIPS'S
MOTION TO DISMISS**

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INTRODUCTION

The people of Minnesota have spoken—and in the State’s third congressional district, did so loudly. On November 24, 2020, the State Canvassing Board certified that Contestee Dean Phillips received 50,041 more votes than his opponent Kendall Qualls.¹ Contestants now ask this Court to overturn that decisive victory, but their effort fails as a matter of law and should be dismissed.

At the outset, Contestants did not satisfy the procedural requirements of the election contest statute. They failed to properly serve Representative Phillips, failed to file this contest in the proper venue, and their notice of contest does not demonstrate they are eligible to assert this contest. These flaws independently preclude this Court from exercising jurisdiction over the action.

In any event, the allegations in Contestants’ notice are plainly inadequate. Contestants stitch together a series of perceived election irregularities into what they allege to be a statewide—or even international—conspiracy. Their allegations, however, rest entirely on speculation, rumor, and conclusory assertions of bad faith. Their kitchen-sink pleadings do not give rise to *any* cognizable legal claim, let alone the one that establishes the sole basis for an election contest: that Representative Phillips did not receive the most votes in his election. At most, Contestants argue that certain statutory election rules were not followed. But even accepting these assertions as true—which, for many of the allegations, requires a hefty suspension of disbelief—they do not

¹ See *Minnesota State Canvassing Report*, Minn. Sec’y of State 18 (Nov. 24, 2020), <https://officialdocuments.sos.state.mn.us/Files/GetDocument/125081>. The Court can take judicial notice of “readily verifiable facts” from a government website. *In re Welfare of Clausen*, 289 N.W.2d 153, 157 (Minn. 1980); see also Minn. R. Evid. 201(b); *United States ex rel. Modglin v. DJO Glob. Inc.*, 48 F. Supp. 3d 1362, 1381 (C.D. Cal. 2014) (interpreting analogous federal rule and concluding that court may take judicial notice of “‘government documents available from reliable sources on the Internet,’ such as websites run by governmental agencies” (quoting *Hansen Beverage Co. v. Innovation Ventures, LLC*, No. 08-CV-1166-IEG (POR), 2009 WL 6597891, at *2 (S.D. Cal. Dec. 23, 2009))).

allege that any ballots were improperly counted or rejected. As a result, the notice of contest fails to satisfy its central requirement: alleging that the outcome of the election would have been different had the perceived irregularities not occurred.

Because the notice's woeful substantive deficiencies divest this Court of jurisdiction to entertain the election contest, the Court must dismiss this action. And because the deadline for serving this election contest has now passed, Contestants have no opportunity to amend their notice. This contest must therefore be dismissed with prejudice.

ARGUMENT

I. **This Court lacks jurisdiction because the Notice of Contest was not timely served.**

Contestants' failure to effectuate timely service on Representative Phillips deprives this Court of jurisdiction. "Because the right to contest an election is purely statutory, the provisions of the statute relating to the filing and serving of notice of contest must be strictly followed if the court is to acquire jurisdiction." *Lebens v. Harbeck*, 243 N.W.2d 128, 129 (Minn. 1976) (per curiam); see also *Christenson v. Allen*, 119 N.W.2d 35, 38 (Minn. 1963) ("[B]oth the right to contest an election and authority of courts to hear and determine an election contest are purely statutory, and in absence of statutory compliance, courts are powerless to entertain such proceedings."). "[T]he legislature has set strict procedural requirements and time limitations in an effort to get election contests expeditiously resolved." *O'Loughlin v. Otis*, 276 N.W.2d 38, 40 (Minn. 1979) (per curiam). As a result, failure to strictly comply with these procedural requirements must result in dismissal of the entire contest. See e.g., *Rachner v. Growe*, 400 N.W.2d 749, 751-52 (Minn. Ct. App. 1987) (election contest dismissed on the ground that the contestant failed to send the notice via certified mail to all interested parties, in addition to proper personal service, as required by statute). Significantly, even substantial compliance with the statutory requirements is insufficient; *all* requirements must be completely satisfied. *O'Loughlin*, 276

N.W.2d at 40-41 (rejecting argument that substantial compliance with notice requirement was adequate to confer jurisdiction).

Representative Phillips did not receive service by the expiration of the statutorily prescribed deadline. “[N]otice must be *served and filed* . . . within seven days after the canvass is completed in the case of a . . . general election.” Minn. Stat. § 209.021, subd. 1 (emphasis added). The canvass is completed when all postelection reviews (“PERs”) under Minnesota Statutes section 206.89 are concluded, which occurs once the Secretary of State reports the results of all postelection reviews at the meeting of the State Canvassing Board. *Id.* § 206.89, subds. 6, 10. Here, the State Canvassing Board met and completed its canvass on November 24. *See supra* at 1 n.1. Contestants’ deadline to file and serve the notice on Representative Phillips was therefore seven days after November 24—December 1, 2020. But they failed to do so. Phillips Aff. ¶¶ 5–6. Contestants failure to effectuate service by December 1 requires immediate dismissal of this contest. *O’Loughlin*, 276 N.W.2d at 40.

II. This Court lacks jurisdiction because the Notice of Contest was filed in the wrong county.

This Court lacks jurisdiction for a second reason: Contestants filed this contest in the wrong county. While Minnesota law prescribes that contests for “statewide office” must be filed in Ramsey County, Minn. Stat. § 209.021, subd. 2, “statewide office” does *not* include seats for the U.S. House of Representatives. *See id.* § 209.01, subd. 2. “For contests relating to any other office, the contestant shall file the notice of contest . . . in the county where the contestee resides.” *Id.* § 209.021, subd. 2. Accordingly, because this contest relates to an election for the U.S. House of Representatives, Contestants should have filed this contest in the county where Representative Phillips resides—Hennepin County. Phillips Aff. ¶ 1. Contestants failure to do so requires dismissal of this contest. *See Lebens*, 243 N.W.2d at 129.

III. This Court lacks jurisdiction because the Notice of Contest does not demonstrate that Contestants were eligible to vote in the election at issue.

In addition to failing to serve their notice timely and file this suit in the right county, Contestants have failed to indicate in their notice of contests that they are entitled to assert this contest. Minnesota law permits only “eligible voter[s]” and “candidate[s]” to assert an election contest. Minn. Stat. § 209.02, subd. 1. A voter may assert an election contest only as to elections in which “the voter had the right to vote.” *Id.* None of Contestants alleges they were a candidate in the election for Minnesota’s third congressional district. And the only information about Contestants provided by the notice is that each of them “is an eligible Minnesota voter.” Notice ¶¶ 1–3. Without indicating where Contestants live or that they were eligible to vote in the election for Minnesota’s third congressional district this year, the notice of contest fails to demonstrate Contestants can pursue this election contest. This failure to strictly comply with the statutory requirements for asserting an election contest independently divests the Court of jurisdiction. *See Christenson*, 119 N.W.2d at 3838.

IV. Contestants’ allegations are facially inadequate to support their contest.

Even if Contestants had satisfied the contest statute’s strict procedural requirements, dismissal would still be required because they fail to sufficiently plead grounds for contest. An election contest is not a garden-variety civil action; it is instead a narrowly drawn proceeding in which the Court may answer *only* the questions identified in the governing statute. Minnesota law expressly limits the grounds upon which an election contest may be brought to the following four issues: (1) whether there was “an irregularity in the conduct of an election or canvass of votes,” (2) “who received the largest number of votes legally cast,” (3) “the number of votes legally cast in favor of or against a question,” and (4) whether there was “deliberate, serious, and material violations of the Minnesota Election Law.” Minn. Stat. § 209.02, subd. 1.

According to their notice, Contestants bring this contest on two grounds: “who received the largest number of votes legally cast” and “deliberate, serious, and material violations of Minnesota Election Law.” Notice of Election Contest Under Minnesota Statutes Chapter 209 (“Notice”) at 2. But when a contest challenges the outcome of a congressional race, “the *only* question to be decided by the court is which party to the contest received the highest number of votes legally cast.” Minn. Stat. § 209.12 (emphasis added). *That’s it*. While “[e]vidence on any other points specified in the notice of contest, including but not limited to the question of . . . deliberate, serious, and material violation of the provision of the Minnesota Election Law, must be taken and preserved by the judge trying the contest, . . . *the judge shall make no findings or conclusion on those points.*” *Id.* (emphasis added). Consequently, the only question this Court may adjudicate with respect to this contest is whether Representative Phillips received the most legal votes. And because the State Canvassing Board’s certification of Representative Phillips as the winner of this election constitutes “prima facie evidence that [Phillips], the contestee, has been elected to the office,” Contestants “bear[] the burden of proof” to “show that the Board’s certification was in error.” *In re Contest of Gen. Election Held on Nov. 4, 2008 for Purpose of Electing U.S. Senator from State of Minn.*, 767 N.W.2d 453, 458 (Minn. 2009) (per curiam).

To meet their burden at the pleading stage, Contestants’ notice of contest must “stat[e] facts upon which, if proved, relief could be granted.” *Greenly v. Indep. Sch. Dist. No. 316*, 395 N.W. 2d 86, 90 (Minn. App. 1986). In the election context, this pleading requirement is jurisdictional; if the notice fails to allege sufficient facts suggesting that Representative Phillips did not obtain the most valid votes, this court lacks jurisdiction and is “powerless to entertain such proceedings.” *Christenson*, 119 N.W. 2d at 38.

The factual allegations contained in Contestants’ notice, even accepted as true, fall fatally

short of this standard. In attempting to piece together alleged irregularities into a cognizable action, they fail to identify how exactly such irregularities would have “change[d] the result of the election,” *Hancock v. Lewis*, 122 N.W.2d 592, 524 (Minn. 1963)—which they *must* do, since “[i]t has been the rule in this state for well over 100 years that violation of a statute regulating the conduct of an election is not fatal to the election in the absence of proof that the irregularity affected the outcome or was the product of fraud or bad faith.” *Hahn v. Graham*, 225 N.W.2d 385, 386 (Minn. 1975). Here, Contestants offer “mere surmise that errors *may* have occurred in counting the ballots.” *Christenson*, 119 N.W.2d at 38-39 (emphasis added). That is simply not enough to reverse Representative Phillips’s 50,041-vote victory.

As discussed, the deadline for serving an adequately pled notice has expired. Because Contestants’ notice is insufficient to confer this Court with jurisdiction, the Court has no power to allow Contestants to amend their notice: “the court cannot appropriate to itself jurisdiction which the law does not give by permitting such amendments after the time for initiating the proceeding has expired.” *Christenson*, 119 N.W.2d at 39. As a result, dismissal with prejudice is required.

A. Contestants’ effort to invalidate mail ballots cast in reliance on a court-approved consent decree is barred by the doctrines of laches and the U.S. Constitution.

Contestants ask this Court to invalidate ballots cast in reliance on a consent decree entered by Ramsey County District Judge Sara Grewing in August 2020, which temporarily suspended the State’s witness-signature requirement for mail ballots during the November general election. *See* Notice at 3 & ¶ 12–15, 50; *see also* Declaration of Charles N. Nauen (“Nauen Decl.”) Ex. 1. But just days ago, in a separate action filed with the Minnesota Supreme Court, that court held that it is far too late to litigate this issue for the November election. *See* Order, *Kistner v. Simon*, No. A20-1486, slip op. at 3–4 (Minn. Dec. 4, 2020) (attached as Nauen Decl. Ex. 2). Indeed, the doctrine of laches bars a challenge to the consent decree that could have—and should have—been

raised months ago.

When there has been “such an unreasonable delay in asserting a known right” that it “result[s] in prejudice to others,” the doctrine of laches prohibits granting the requested relief. *Piepho v. Bruns*, 652 N.W.2d 40, 43 (Minn. 2002) (per curiam) (quoting *Fetsch v. Holm*, 52 N.W.2d 113, 115 (Minn. 1952)); see also Order, *Kelly v. Commonwealth*, No. 68 MAP 2020, slip op. at 2 (Pa. Nov. 28, 2020) (dismissing postelection challenge to certification under “doctrine of laches given [Contestants’] complete failure to act with due diligence”) (per curiam) (attached as Nauen Decl. Ex. 3). Minnesota courts routinely apply laches in the elections context. See *Clark v. Reddick*, 791 N.W.2d 292, 294–96 (Minn. 2010) (per curiam); *Clark v. Pawlenty*, 755 N.W.2d 293, 303 (Minn. 2008) (per curiam); *Marsh v. Holm*, 55 N.W.2d 302, 304 (Minn. 1952). Indeed, enforcing laches is critical in the context of elections because the “very nature of matters implicating election laws and proceedings routinely require expeditious consideration and disposition by courts facing considerable time constraints imposed by the ballot preparation and distribution process.” *Peterson v. Stafford*, 490 N.W.2d 418, 419 (Minn. 1992).

Here, the consent decree Contestants challenge was entered on August 3. See Nauen Decl. Ex. 1. After that consent decree was signed, Contestants did nothing. They waited as August, September, October, and almost all of November passed. During these intervening months, the Secretary, state and local officials, voter education groups, and the media publicized the consent decree’s provisions, including the instruction that mail ballots may be submitted without a witness signature. On September 18, election officials began distributing mail ballots with instructions that “[a] witness is not required for registered absentee voters for the 2020 Minnesota State General.” Nauen Decl. Ex. 4, at 3–8. Contestants should have known of this critical date, as it was emphasized in both Judge Grewing’s order, Nauen Decl. Ex. 1, at 18, and the consent decree itself,

Nauen Decl. Ex. 5, at 3, 6. And yet still Contestants waited, as Election Day came and went and Minnesotans' ballots were tallied and canvassed by county officials. Contestants did not challenge the consent decree until they initiated this contest, well after the general election was conducted pursuant to the challenged consent decree—including the receipt and processing of *1.9 million* absentee and mail ballots.

Contestants' delay is as apparent as it is inexcusable. They could have challenged the consent decree months ago, well before mail ballots were distributed, voted, and tabulated. In the context of election litigation, courts require parties to “bring the[ir] grievances forward for *pre*-election adjudication,” and bar such claims if brought only after the election. *Toney v. White*, 488 F.2d 310, 314 (5th Cir. 1973) (en banc). This is for good reason: “the failure to require prompt pre-election action . . . as a prerequisite to post-election relief may permit, if not encourage, parties who could raise a claim ‘to lay by and gamble upon receiving a favorable decision of the electorate’ and then, upon losing, seek to undo the ballot results in a court action.” *Id.* (quoting *Toney v. White*, 476 F.2d 203, 209 (5th Cir. 1973)). This case is a perfect example of such unreasonable delay. *See Kistner*, slip op. at 3–4.

The prejudice that would be caused by allowing Contestants to assert this challenge in the *post*-election phase is readily apparent as well. Election laws and rules engender significant reliance interests on the parts of both voters and officials. *See, e.g., Bognet v. Sec’y of Commonwealth*, No. 20-3214, 2020 WL 6686120, at *17 (3d Cir. Nov. 13, 2020) (concluding that “[u]nique and important equitable considerations, including voters’ reliance on the rules in place when they made their plans to vote and chose how to cast their ballots,” counsel against late-hour change to election law); *Kay v. Austin*, 621 F.2d 809, 813 (6th Cir. 1980) (“As time passes, the state’s interest in proceeding with the election increases in importance as resources are committed

and irrevocable decisions are made.”). This is especially true of postelection challenges like this, which threaten disenfranchisement of voters who cast their ballots in reliance on previously settled election rules—precisely the risk that Contestants have created with this untimely contest. Accordingly, the Minnesota Supreme Court has “insisted that [parties] move expeditiously . . . because the time constraints associated with elections demand diligence in asserting known rights.” *Kistner*, slip op. at 3.

Here, Contestants ask to nullify the votes of Minnesotans who followed the official rules and guidelines and cast their ballots accordingly—a result not only prejudicial, but likely unconstitutional as well. *See, e.g., United States v. Saylor*, 322 U.S. 385, 387–88 (1944) (“[T]o refuse to count and return the vote as cast [is] as much an infringement of that personal right as to exclude the voter from the polling place.”); *Ne. Ohio Coal. for Homeless v. Husted*, 696 F.3d 580, 595, 597–98 (6th Cir. 2012) (concluding that rejection of ballots invalidly cast due to poll worker error likely violates due process); *Donald J. Trump for President, Inc. v. Boockvar*, No. 4:20-CV-02078, 2020 WL 6821992, at *1 (M.D. Pa. Nov. 21, 2020) (“Plaintiffs ask this Court to disenfranchise almost seven million voters. This Court has been unable to find any case in which a plaintiff has sought such a drastic remedy in the contest of an election, in terms of the sheer volume of votes asked to be invalidated.”). This case illustrates well why the doctrine of laches carries such force in the election context: the risk of prejudice to voters, officials, and candidates is unconscionably high, especially where Contestants could have and should have brought their challenges at an earlier, less disruptive point. *See Kistner*, slip op. at 4 (“We [] must consider the impact of petitioners’ requested relief on election officials, candidates, and voters who participated

in the 2020 general election knowing that the witness requirement was suspended.”).²

In short, “[g]iven the undisputed public record regarding the suspension of the witness requirement for absentee and mail ballots, [Contestants] had a duty to act well before November 3, 2020, to assert claims that challenged that procedure; asserting these claims 2 months after voting started[and] 3 weeks after voting ended . . . is unreasonable.” *Id.* This Court should therefore follow the Minnesota Supreme Court and conclude that laches bars any challenge to the consent decree.³

B. Contestants’ allegations of purported irregularities fail to indicate any impact on the outcome of Representative Phillips’s 50,041-vote victory.

Contestants’ notice also offers a hodgepodge of purported irregularities, many of which lack any meaningful description or explanation. None of these alleged irregularities—even when considered cumulatively—provides any reason to believe that Representative Phillips did not obtain the most valid votes in the race for Minnesota’s third congressional district. Because this is the only ground on which Contestants can assert their election contest against Representative Phillips, *see* Minn. Stat. § 209.12; *see also supra* at 5, this insufficiency is fatal and this contest must be dismissed.

² Similarly, it is far too late for Contestants to object to the fact that the Secretary apparently instructed ballot boards to begin opening mail ballots 14 days prior to the election, rather than seven days. Notice ¶ 19. In any event, Contestants do not explain how that action impacted the outcome of the election at issue here.

³ Moreover, Contestants’ vague assertion that the consent decree’s elimination of the witness-signature requirement created a mere *opportunity* for fraud is not, and cannot be, sufficient to overturn this election. *See* Notice ¶ 50. Contestants do not allege that a single instance of voter fraud actually occurred as a result of the consent decree. As the Minnesota Supreme Court has held, the simple allegation that fraud *potentially* occurred during an election is insufficient to confer courts with jurisdiction to adjudicate election contests. *See Christenson*, 119 N.W.2d at 37 (affirming dismissal of election contest in which contestant alleged only that there was “reason to believe that possible errors could have occurred in counting of ballots”).

1. Dominion Voting Machines

Contestants baldly claim that “the entire world has been following news about tampering with Dominion voting machines” and that “[t]here are many examples of [] vote count anomalies in Minnesota” and “issues with systems being down or experiencing unexplained so-called ‘glitches’ during the night allowing for the alteration of vote counts.” Notice at 7. Yet they do not cite or describe a *single* example of such anomalies or glitches. Unadorned assertions of irregularities and fraud cannot serve as the basis of an election contest. *See Hancock*, 122 N.W.2d at 595. As a result, their allegations involving the Dominion voting machines are not actionable.

Indeed, instead of specific irregularities, Contestants present only what they apparently believe is a smoking gun: a “520-pound Dominion voting machine” that was apparently “delivered FEDEX to Dakota County *after* the election and just a few days prior to its November 16, 2020, postelection review.” *Id.*; *see also id.* at 14. But Contestants do not bother to explain *why* this fact supports their election contest. It is not the Court’s role to make these arguments for Contestants. Nor is it Contestee’s. Without any information about this machine—or, more importantly, any argument as to why Contestants believe it amounts to an irregularity that affected the outcome of the election at issue—Contestee cannot provide a meaningful response to this claim. As a result, this aspect of the notice is plainly deficient. *See Greenly*, 395 N.W.2d at 90 (noting that, at minimum, notice of contest must “apprise the contestee of the grounds of the contest so that he is given a fair opportunity to meet the asserted claims”).

2. Ballot Board Election Judges

Similarly, Contestants’ unexplained assertion that “Ballot Boards across Minnesota failed to operate with [] consistent standards,” such as the requirement “to utilize election judges of different major political parties,” cannot serve as a ground for an election contest. Notice at 6. The

Minnesota Supreme Court has squarely held that “improper appointment or conduct of election judges” is not an adequate basis to sustain an election contest, even when “the ‘opportunity to influence’ has been present.” *Hahn*, 225 N.W.2d at 387. While Contestants claim “[t]hese officials were responsible to ensure the absentee ballots were properly accepted or rejected” pursuant to Minnesota law, they do not assert that any ballots were improperly accepted or rejected. Notice at 6. Once again, that is fatal to this contest.

Moreover, even if this vague allegation *could* support a proper election contest, this assertion still fails because Ballot Boards are not necessarily subject to any partisan-balancing requirement. Ramsey County District Judge Thomas Gilligan recently rejected similar claims regarding the composition of Ballot Boards in Duluth, Ramsey, and Olmstead Counties, as well as the City of Minneapolis. See *In re Petitions by the Minnesota Voters Alliance, et al. for Writs of Mandamus*, No. 62-cv-20-4124 (Ramsey Cty. Dist. Ct. Sept. 24, 2020) (attached as Nauen Decl. Ex. 6). As that court explained, Minnesota Rule 8210.2450 provides that absentee ballots may be reviewed either by partisan Ballot Board members (in which case the partisan-balancing requirement applies) *or* trained deputies. *Id.* at 33. If trained deputies are used, then the partisan-balancing requirement does not apply. *Id.* at 33–34. Contestants’ notice does not specify which option any county employed for its Ballots Boards, and so it is equally likely that no partisan-balancing requirement applied there either. Thus, not only does Contestants’ objection to the Dakota County Ballot Board’s actions fail to identify an irregularity that impacted the outcome of the election, it fails to identify an irregularity at all.

3. Other “Irregularities”

Contestants vaguely point to other alleged “irregularities” without explaining how they impact the outcome of the race at issue in this contest. For example, Contestants’ allegation that a

state legislator told two of his colleagues that he had votes “banked for his re-election” and obtained a poll for which he allegedly did not pay, Notice ¶ 20, is far too ambiguous to support an election contest. Contestants do not explain what they believe it means to have a vote “banked,” or why they believe that amounts to an irregularity. Nor they do explain how these allegations impacted the outcome of the race in the third congressional district.

Similarly, Contestants claim that Project Veritas “broke” a story about alleged “ballot harvesting” in the fifth congressional district, and they complain that the Secretary of State and the Minnesota Attorney General did not “act[] quickly” in response. Notice at 3 & ¶ 21. But this election contest challenges the election in the *third* congressional district, not the fifth congressional district. And in any event, Contestants do not allege that such “ballot harvesting” impacted the outcome of this election.

4. Postelection Reviews

The vast majority of Contestants’ allegations relate to the PER process, specifically in Dakota County, which is *not* in the third congressional district. As an initial matter, irregularities that occurred in a PER cannot serve as the basis for an election challenge. A PER does not determine which candidate in a race won the most votes; rather, as Contestants’ own evidence explains, the PER is simply “a manual recount (or ‘audit’) of randomly-selected precincts for specific offices.” Affidavit of Jane L. Volz (“Volz. Aff.”) Ex. D, at 5. Accordingly, irregularities occurring during the PER do not impact the *outcome* of the election. Instead, the PER merely serves as a check to ensure that the vote totals—which have already been completed—are correct.

Nonetheless, even if irregularities occurring during the PER could support an election contest (which they cannot)—and even assuming alleged irregularities occurring in a county *outside* of the congressional district at issue in this contest have some relevance to this inquiry—

the PER-related allegations in Contestants' notice offer no reason to infer that Representative Phillips did not win this election.

Inter-County Procedural Differences. Contestants' claim that counties "had completely different procedures" when performing the PER process does not indicate that Representative Phillips did not win the election. Notice ¶ 31. Contestants offer just two examples to support their claim that counties performed their PERs differently. Ramsey County allegedly delayed its PER date by two days, causing individuals who were not properly notified of the change to "show[] up to observe the PER" two days early. *Id.* However regrettable it might be that residents of Ramsey County had to travel to the PER site twice, this inconvenience does not give rise to a viable legal claim, let alone in the limited context of an election contest. In any event, Ramsey County is not in the third congressional district, so even if this were an irregularity, it would not have impacted the outcome of the election at issue here.

Contestants' other cited example is Hennepin County, which allegedly decided to allow the public to observe its PER process remotely instead of in person, given the surging COVID-19 cases in the area. *Id.* But, again, Contestants do not allege that, in doing so, Hennepin County improperly counted or rejected any votes.

Ballot Delivery. Contestants' claim that "[b]allots were delivered to the Dakota County [PER venue] in a variety of ways" also fails to suggest that votes were improperly counted or rejecting. *Id.* at 14. Again, it is worth noting that Dakota County is not in the third congressional district. In any event, Contestants' allegations in this respect are difficult to pin down. According to their notice, some ballots were delivered too haphazardly. *See id.* (describing ballots arriving in boxes). But other ballots were apparently *too neatly stacked*. *See id.* (describing stack of ballots that were "squared up" and had "identical crease[s] that ran through the pile in the same

direction”). Contestants’ argument implies that this Court should assume that any ballot reviewed during the PER process was fraudulent unless it passed some sort of ill-defined, Goldilocks-inspired appearance test. That assertion flips the burden of proof in an election contest on its head, and certainly provides no indication of unlawfully counted ballots.

Election Judges. Contestants’ allegation that members of the staff of Dakota County Elections Director Andy Lokken (“Director Lokken”) assisted the PER process, rather than election judges, is not an irregularity at all, let alone one that gives rise to an inference that Representative Phillips did not win his election. Notice ¶ 35. There is no requirement that election judges be appointed to assist the PER process. While the PER official “*may* be assisted by election judges designated by the [PER] official for this purpose,” election judges are not required to be in attendance. Minn. Stat. § 206.89, subd. 3. And as the PER Manual explains, the PER officials’ staffs may assist this process. Volz Aff. Ex. D, at 9.

In any event, as already discussed, “improper appointment or conduct of election judges” is not an adequate basis to sustain an election contest, even when “the ‘opportunity to influence’ has been present.” *Hahn*, 225 N.W.2d at 387. Contestants do not claim that any staff member assisting the Dakota County PER process engaged in any improper activity. While they allege that one member of the staff “appeared very biased,” Notice ¶ 17, they do not explain why that person appeared biased, nor do they allege that this staff person did anything that would have affected the outcome of the election in the third congressional district, in which Dakota County is *not* located.

Observational Access. Contestants’ claim that observers in Dakota County (which is not in the third congressional district) were not permitted to “meaningfully observe” the counting process similarly fails. Notice ¶ 36. As an initial matter, Contestants fail to point to any legal requirement that observers be permitted to stand over the shoulders of PER workers. *Cf. State v.*

Jorgenson, 946 N.W.2d 596, 605 (Minn. 2020) (refusing to add words to provision in manner that “would rewrite the statute”). Indeed, to the contrary, the PER Manual states that the PER venue should be assembled such that the PER process occurs in a different “area” than where observers are permitted to stand. Volz Aff. Decl. D, at 10. As it explains: “[o]nly those people directly involved in the review should be present *within* the reviewing area,” and those individuals comprise “the review officials and legal advisor and officials of the election jurisdiction.” *Id.* (emphasis added). PER observers are permitted only to “be admitted into the room where the review is being conducted to observe proceedings from *outside the review area.*” *Id.* (emphasis added). Contestants do not assert that they were denied the ability to be in the room where the PER was taking place, or that they were denied the ability to observe the proceedings from outside the area in which the PER was occurring. Thus, no alleged irregularity occurred. *See In re Canvassing Observation*, No. 30 EAP 2020, 2020 WL 6737895, at *8 (Pa. Nov. 17, 2020) (noting that similar observation law “contemplates an opportunity to broadly observe the mechanics of the canvassing process” but does “not set a minimum distance between authorized representatives and canvassing activities,” and declining to “judicially rewrite the statute by imposing distance requirements where the legislature has, in the exercise of its policy judgment, seen fit not to do so”).⁴

Tabulation Sheets. Contestants’ complaints about Director Lokken’s handling of the PER tabulation sheets do not give rise to any claim that Representative Phillips did not win his election,

⁴ Contestants’ notice asserts that the PER is subject to the Open Meeting Law contained in Minnesota Statutes section 13D.01. *See* Notice ¶ 25. But nothing in the Open Meeting Law mandates that the public be permitted to stand within a particular distance of the open meeting at issue, let alone within *six feet* of election staff performing their duties in the midst of a deadly pandemic. Even assuming that the PER is subject to the Open Meeting Law, the only relevant requirement that statute imposed on the PER process was that it be made “open to the public.” Minn. Stat. § 13D.01, subd. 1. There can be no question that the Dakota County PER was open to the public.

in which Dakota County voters did not participate. They first assert that Director Lokken “promised” Jane Volz, who attended the PER, that he would “give [Volz] a copy of all of the worksheets at the end of the day,” but he instead sent Volz an electronic copy of the results the following day. Notice ¶ 40. Unsurprisingly, Contestants fail to identify a legal basis upon which this Court could (or should) overturn an election because an election official did not keep his word to a PER observer. Next, Contestants allege that Lokken recycled the tabulation sheets after transferring them to electronic form. *Id.* ¶ 41. But, again, that fact does not indicate that the vote count that the PER was *reviewing* was inaccurate.

Finally, Contestants claim that the electronic version of the PER hand-count results differed from the results indicated on hand-written tabulation sheets that Volz captured on her phone during the PER process. *See* Notice ¶ 14. But a review of the documents provided in Volz’s affidavit makes clear that there is no meaningful mismatch in the hand-count results between the handwritten and electronic versions of the worksheet. Volz’s declaration offers handwritten and digital worksheets from five polling places: Eagan P-13, Farmington, Hastings W-2 P-1, Hastings W-4 P-2, and West Paul W-2 P-2. Looking for example, at the presidential results, there is no difference between the hand-count results between the electronic and handwritten version of the tabulation sheets in all polling places other than West St. Paul W-2 P-2. *Compare* Volz Aff. Ex. B, *with id.* Ex. C. And while there *is* a difference between the electronic and handwritten PER vote counts for the West St. Paul W-2 P-2 polling place, that difference resulted in President-Elect Biden receiving 667 fewer votes and President Trump receiving just 184 fewer votes.⁵ In other

⁵ In the electronic version of the West St. Paul W-2 P-2 precinct worksheet, the apparent vote difference appears to be accounted for in the “Total Unadjusted Difference” category. Volz Aff. Ex. C. Moreover, this worksheet confirms that those votes were counted, and that there was a “difference of not more than 0.5%” from the original vote totals. Accordingly, while it is not clear

words, whatever differences Contestants have identified between the handwritten and electronic PER reports, those differences ended up being more harmful to Democrats than their opponents.⁶

In sum, none of the purported irregularities identified by Contestants in their notice would have altered the outcome of Representative Phillips’s 50,041-vote victory in the race for Minnesota’s third congressional district. As a result, this election contest is “insufficient to invoke the jurisdiction of the court” and must be dismissed. *Christenson*, 119 N.W.2d at 41.

V. Even if this Court had jurisdiction to address Contestants’ assertions of deliberate, serious, or material violations of Minnesota election law, this claim fails.

As discussed, *supra* at 5, in this challenge to Representative Phillips’s congressional election, this Court has no power to adjudicate claims of deliberate, serious, or material violations of the Minnesota election law. *See* Minn. Stat. § 209.12. And for the reasons above, the Court lacks jurisdiction to adjudicate the only permissible question present—which candidate won the most votes in the election for the third congressional district.

But even if this Court had jurisdiction to consider Contestants’ claim that deliberate, serious, and material violations of Minnesota’s election law occurred, their notice of contest fails to identify any such violations. “For a violation to be ‘deliberate,’ it must be intended to affect the voting at the election.” *Schmitt v. McLaughlin*, 275 N.W.2d 587, 591 (Minn. 1979). For a violation to be “serious,” it must be “one that is not trivial.” *Id.* And a violation is “material” only if it contributed in “any ‘material’ degree” to the outcome of the election. *Effertz v. Schimelpfenig*, 291 N.W. 286, 288 (Minn. 1940); *see also Dart v. Erickson*, 248 N.W. 706, 708 (Minn. 1933).

why the votes were segregated in the “Total Unadjusted Difference” category in this worksheet, they were accounted for and counted.

⁶ Contestants further assert that Lokken failed to report the number of “blank for office” votes cast in particular races, referring to ballots where the voter failed to choose a candidate in that race. Notice ¶ 41. But again, even assuming that failure amounts to an irregularity, it would not change the result of in the third congressional district.

None of the purported irregularities identified in the notice qualifies as deliberate, serious, or material violations of Minnesota election law. Any challenge by Contestants to the consent decree is barred by the doctrine of laches and risks violating the due process rights of voters who relied on it. *See supra* at 6–10. Contestants’ vague and conclusory allegations regarding Dominion voting machines fail to identify any violation of Minnesota law, let alone a deliberate, serious, or material one. *See supra* at 10–11. And Contestants’ challenge to the alleged partisan imbalance of the Dakota County Ballot Board fails because Minnesota law does not necessarily require Ballot Board members to be balanced on a partisan basis—and even if it did, Contestants do not explain how a lack of such balance was “intended to affect voting” or impacted the outcome of the election in any way. *See supra* at 11–12.

Nor do the allegations regarding the PER process suggest deliberate, serious, or material violations of Minnesota election law. *See supra* at 12–17. Ramsey County’s delay of its PER by two days and Hennepin County’s use of remote access for PER observers did not violate Minnesota law, let alone deliberately, seriously, or materially. While Contestants claim that ballots were transported to the PER venue in improper containers (and that a stack of ballots was too neatly aligned), they do not explain how that impacted the outcome of the election. Their allegation that the Dakota County PER was performed by Director Lokken’s staff, rather than election judges, does not identify a violation of Minnesota law. Contestants similarly fail to identify any Minnesota law that was violated when PER observers in Dakota County were not permitted to stand within six feet of those performing the PER. And their assertions about any discrepancies between the handwritten and electronic versions of the PER results worksheets cannot constitute a deliberate, serious, or material violation of law for purposes of this contest because, if anything, those discrepancies *narrowed*, rather than expanded, Democrats’ margin of victory.

CONCLUSION

Contestants failed to properly serve their notice of contest, filed in the wrong county, and failed to demonstrate they are entitled to assert this contest. Each of these failures independently divest jurisdiction from the Court. But even if Contestants had not engaged in these failures, their notice of contest does not contain sufficient allegations of irregularities to confer jurisdiction on this Court. And because the time for filing a contest has now passed, the Court cannot provide Contestants an opportunity to amend their notice. For these reasons, this Court should dismiss this action with prejudice.

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Dated: December 8, 2020

LOCKRIDGE GRINDAL NAUEN P.L.L.P.

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