

## Former Stamford Dem Party boss charged with falsifying absentee ballots

By Angela Carella

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John Mallozzi charged with 14 counts each of filing false statements and second-degree forgery in an identity-theft scheme involving absentee ballots stemming from the 2015 municipal election.

STAMFORD — John Mallozzi, the city's former Democratic Party chief, was arrested Wednesday on charges of absentee ballot fraud in the 2015 municipal election. He allegedly forged ballots for relatives, Spanish-speaking residents and Albanian-Americans new to the election system, according to the State's Attorney's Office.

Mallozzi was charged with 14 counts each of filing false statements and second-degree forgery. He turned himself in to Stamford police on the charges, both Class D felonies punishable by up to five years in prison and/or a fine of up to \$5,000 per count.

Bail was set at \$50,000.

Mallozzi, a longtime figure in city politics, chaired the Stamford Democratic City Committee from 2012 to 2016, and was a member of the Democratic State Central Committee. He played a key role in Mayor David Martin's 2013 election victory.

Investigators with the State's Attorney's Office in Stamford allege that Mallozzi's handwriting matched that of signatures on 14 absentee ballots assigned to voters who said they never requested them.

According to the arrest affidavit, the town clerk's office wrote Mallozzi's initials on 34 ballot applications to indicate they went to him. A state forensic scientist determined that 14 of the resulting ballots were fraudulent, the affidavit states.

State's Attorney Richard J. Colangelo Jr. said the probe was limited to the one election, in which Stamford voters chose city representatives and members of the finance and school boards.

"We investigated the 2015 election," Colangelo said Wednesday. "Anything prior to that, there were no records for us to look at."

'Good faith'

Mallozzi's attorney, Stephan Seeger, said his client is taking the allegations very seriously.

"Mr. Mallozzi has fully cooperated, honoring all of the state's attorney's requests for assistance in the investigation," Seeger said by email. "He has been an active participant in community politics for three decades, and has faced these allegations head-on from the outset, because he believes in the system and its inherent fairness."

Allegations of election irregularities "in our current political climate stir up deep-seated emotions," Seeger said. "Accordingly, this case could easily be misunderstood as one involving an attempt to skew election results, or gain an unfair advantage. However, nothing could be further from the truth."

Rather, Mallozzi's conduct "was cloaked in good faith," Seeger said.

"That is why any irregularity for which he has been charged does not rise to the level of criminal conduct," he said. "If you take a look at the whole picture, it becomes clear that absentee ballot procedures lend themselves to what might be referred to as procedural complacencies."

Mallozzi will plead not guilty to the charges and will continue to work with Colangelo's office toward a "fair resolution," Seeger said.

"And if there is a silver lining in any of this, the absentee ballot procedures will be revisited and tightened, rules with oversight will lead toward increased election integrity instead of suspicion," he said.

Good friend

Martin, a Democrat, said in a statement that Mallozzi has been his good friend for 35 years.

“I do not know — and it is not my place to say — if John is guilty of the charges against him; I leave that responsibility to the state and the judicial process,” the mayor said. “I can only hope — for the friendship I’ve had with John and for the sanctity of our city’s elections — that these charges are not true. Voting is one of the most sacred processes in our democracy and I hope these charges will lead to renewed faith in our society’s belief in democracy and justice.”

Josh Fedeli, who succeeded Mallozzi as the head of the Democratic City Committee, said the party cooperated fully with the investigation by Colangelo’s office.

“This is not a systemic problem within the party,” Fedeli said. “There was never a time when the Democratic Party was in question, or when the party as an entity was found to have done something wrong. This was the result of the actions of one individual. Any and all wrongdoing should be brought to our attention, and we hold the rights of voters to be most paramount in the democratic process.”

Since the investigation came to light, the party has had training sessions to ensure that members understand the proper handling of absentee ballots, Fedeli said.

“We put processes in place in subsequent elections to ensure there were no issues. We implemented them in the 2016, 2017 and 2018 elections,” he said.

The 2015 election was strictly municipal. Stamford voters cast ballots to fill five open seats on the Board of Representatives, five on the Board of Education, and three on the Board of Finance. Only 20 percent of Stamford voters showed up at the polls.

#### Absentee effect

Information from Stamford’s registrars of voters shows that 708 votes were cast by absentee ballot in the 2015 election. They accounted for 6 percent of the total 11,858 votes.

But, because turnout was so low, the small number of absentee ballots had the potential to influence individual races.

In the Board of Representatives races, for example, Democratic incumbent Michael Briscoe of District 17 was declared the winner, defeating Republican Jon Hoch by one vote. A recount, however, declared Hoch the winner by one vote.

On the Board of Finance, Democrat David Kooris beat the next-highest vote-getter, Republican Dennis Mahoney, by 99 votes. The difference in their absentee-ballot votes, 351 for Kooris and 242 for Mahoney, was 109 — enough to turn the race.

Fritz Blau, chairman of Stamford’s Republican Town Committee, said he looks at the bigger picture. “Let’s see where the investigation goes, and if there’s a trial. It has to go through the process,” Blau said. “But if people are going to put their trust in the democratic process, they can’t have this overriding concern that their vote doesn’t count because someone came in and did something illegal.”

#### Voted twice?

According to the arrest warrant affidavit, the alleged fraud was uncovered when Stamford Republican Registrar of Voters Lucy Corelli contacted the State Elections Enforcement Commission to report that a Stamford man, Shkadran Hoti, had voted twice in the 2015 election — once by absentee ballot and once at the polls.

Hoti told investigators that on Election Day 2015 he was rejected at his District 8 polling place in the Cove by a monitor who told him the record showed he’d already voted by absentee ballot. Hoti said he had not. The monitor allowed Hoti to vote after Hoti filled out a form attesting that he did not vote by absentee.

Donna Loglisci, the town clerk at the time, checked and found an absentee ballot application and a ballot in Hoti’s name, but the signatures on those did not match the signature on Hoti’s voter registration card.

State Elections Enforcement Commission officials investigated, and in May 2017 contacted the State’s Attorney’s Office in Stamford to report that Mallozzi “orchestrated the submission of possibly 29 fraudulent absentee ballot applications and 26 fraudulent absentee ballots” to the town clerk’s office, the arrest affidavit states.

Inspectors with the state's attorney's office sent the documents with Hoti's signature to the state's Division of Scientific Services Laboratory, where an analyst determined that the signatures on the ballot package were not Hoti's.

#### Initial tags

Using state voter registration records, inspectors found another Stamford man, Isen Hoti, who was reported to have voted by absentee ballot but claimed he had not. Isen Hoti's signature also did not match the signatures on his absentee ballot package.

Inspectors found that the town clerk's office had written initials on the ballot applications and on the ballots for both Hoti men indicating they were given to Mallozzi, according to the affidavit. Inspectors requested all ballot sets with Mallozzi's initials on them. Loglisci found 34 applications and 27 ballots.

Loglisci then gave a sworn statement saying Mallozzi told her sometime before the 2015 election that several Stamford voters had asked him to deliver their absentee ballot applications to her office, then bring them ballots. Once the applications were processed and the ballots were prepared, Mallozzi told Loglisci either he or his representative would pick up the ballots and deliver them to the voters, according to the affidavit.

Loglisci, a Republican, agreed. In 2017 sources close to the investigation told Hearst Connecticut Media that Loglisci routinely provided blank absentee ballots to political-party workers. State law requires that the ballots go directly to voters. Loglisci, who failed in her 2017 re-election bid for town clerk, has not been charged.

#### Writing samples

According to the affidavit, Mallozzi refused to cooperate with state election officials, but hired Seeger and agreed to be interviewed by the state's attorney's office.

Of the 34 applications investigated, seven were in Spanish, five were for members of Mallozzi's family and 22 were for Stamford residents of Albanian descent, most of whom were recently registered voters, according to the affidavit.

"Many of the signatures (on the ballot applications) appear to be a similar style of writing," the affidavit states.

Twelve people told investigators they did not complete a ballot application, receive a ballot or even vote in the 2015 election.

In March 2018, Mallozzi and his attorney went to the state's attorney's office to provide handwriting samples, according to the affidavit.

On Jan. 10 a state forensic science analyst determined that signatures on 14 absentee ballots "share common authorship" with the handwriting samples provided by Mallozzi, according to the affidavit. None of the 14 voters whose names were on the ballots had requested them, the affidavit states.

Mallozzi is scheduled to be arraigned in Stamford Superior Court Feb. 11.  
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Stamford town clerk allegedly broke voting rules, sources say

By Angela Carella and Neil Vigdor

Updated 4:22 pm EDT, Friday, June 30, 2017

STAMFORD — The town clerk allegedly violated procedures designed to protect the integrity of absentee ballots in the 2015 municipal election — now the subject of a criminal investigation by the state's attorney, according to two sources with firsthand knowledge of the case.

The investigation has found that [Donna Loglisci](#), who has been town clerk for 16 years, routinely provided blank absentee ballots to political-party workers, sources told [Hearst Connecticut Media](#). State law dictates that the ballots go directly to voters.

Sources said officials with the [State Elections Enforcement Commission](#), which initially reviewed the matter, told prosecutors there was a breakdown in the chain of custody of the ballots in the town clerk's office.

Loglisci, a Republican, is a witness in the criminal investigation of the 2015 election, the sources said. She did not return calls seeking comment.

City Director of Legal Affairs Kathryn Emmett said Friday in an email that "we have advised Donna not to discuss or make any comment about the investigation."

Emmett said earlier through a spokeswoman that "the city would represent Donna Loglisci or provide her with representation as she is the town clerk and a city official. The city would not represent Donna for criminal issues, if there are any."

Sources told Hearst Connecticut Media last week that prosecutors investigating an alleged identity-theft scheme involving the absentee ballots are looking into the role of former [Democratic City Committee](#) Chairman [John Mallozzi](#).

Such ballots may be filled out in person in the town clerk's office or one may be mailed to a verified address. Once completed, voters may mail the absentee ballot to the town clerk, deliver it in person, or designate a family member to hand it in, according to guidelines set by law.

[Mallozzi and Democratic Party](#) volunteers allegedly requested more than 30 absentee ballots under the names of unsuspecting voters and cast them for candidates for the [Board of Finance](#), [Board of Representatives](#) and [Board of Education](#) in 2015, sources have said.

Mallozzi's attorney, [Stephan Seeger](#), said Thursday that, since the state has checks in place for handling absentee ballots, the matter "needs to be traced back to the town clerk" or that office. But he thinks it unlikely that any investigation in the 2015 Stamford election would "rise to the level of criminal conduct," he said.

"If there were an irregularity at that high of a level, it seems to me to be a much more serious situation than the one being attributed to my client," Seeger said. "That would involve a person in a position of great control connected directly to the vote count."

Seeger has said the investigation into his client is "not anywhere near the criminal level" and is more about a failure to follow procedures.

"But certainly there are irregularities, and in political circles it will become a basis for mudslinging, especially taken against the backdrop of the coming election," he said.

Stamford voters will select a mayor and candidates for several boards in November.

The alleged scheme came to light after a Cove man, Shkodran Hoti, went to vote in District 8 on Nov. 3, 2015 but was told his ballot had already been cast by absentee. Poll workers checked his signature against the signature on the absentee ballot in his name and found they did not match.

Sources told Hearst Connecticut Media last week that the scheme is extensive. The scope of it is not yet known.

Data from the Stamford registrars of voters shows 708 votes were cast by absentee ballot in that election, accounting for 6 percent of the 11,858 total.

Because so few people participated in that election, the small portion of absentee ballots had the potential to influence city races. Voter turnout was about 20 percent.

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