

3531 Evans Ridge Drive  
Chamblee, GA 30341  
April 27, 2020

To the DeKalb Board of Registration and Elections  
Chairman Samuel Tillman  
Vice Chairman Baoky Vu  
Member Anthony Lewis  
Member Dele Lowman Smith  
Member Susan Motter  
Director Erica Hamilton

Subject: Rep. Vernon Jones' eligibility in House District 91 and related matters

As a DeKalb County voter and taxpayer, I request that the DeKalb County Board of Registration and Elections investigate the current residency status of Vernon Jones, listed as registered to vote at 5560 Mayfair Crossing Drive, Lithonia, Georgia 30058. The legitimacy of Mr. Jones' use of this address has been called into question. In a challenge filed with the Georgia Secretary of State's Office on March 26, DeKalb resident Faye Coffield sought to have Mr. Jones declared ineligible to run for the House District 91 seat.

The challenge, containing numerous supporting exhibits, claims that Mr. Jones does not reside at the Mayfair Crossing address, but instead lives at 854 Moreland Avenue, Atlanta, Georgia 30316. DeKalb property tax records confirm that a Vernon Jones owns a house at the Atlanta address, in House District 89. The complaint states that Mr. Jones bought the Mayfair Crossing property in 1997 and sold it in 2001—nearly two decades ago; it also notes that Mr. Jones has listed numerous P.O. boxes as his address in documents and filings during the intervening years. A copy of Ms. Coffield's challenge is attached.

The challenge was filed on March 26, and a hearing was set for April 21. It was postponed. The next day, April 22, Mr. Jones announced his resignation from office. The day after that, Mr. Jones rescinded his resignation, but also sent this signed and notarized correspondence to Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger stating, "This is my request to have to be withdrawn and removed from the primary ballot for June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020 effective April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020." A copy is attached.

It's noteworthy that Mr. Jones has requested to withdraw his candidacy in House District 91 without offering any defense against the charges. While Mr. Jones called the challenge "baseless and without merit," the circumstances of his quiet withdrawal from the race suggest otherwise.

Mr. Jones' withdrawal request is currently being processed and is expected to be completed soon. Meanwhile, another hearing on the matter has been set for May 8. Under these circumstances, and with the background laid out below, the causative effect of the challenge on subsequent events should not be diminished or ignored, despite media reports that have focused on other issues.

While the purpose of Ms. Coffield's challenge was to have Mr. Jones declared ineligible to run for office, there are other matters that should be addressed. A completed withdrawal should moot the Coffield challenge, but questions remain about Rep. Jones' voting eligibility in House

District 91 and his eligibility to continue serving as a state representative. Simply put: “The seat of a member of the House of Representatives shall be vacant when such member moves his or her legal residence from the district from which elected.” Georgia Constitution, Article 3, Section, 4, Paragraph 5.

### ***Prior history***

It’s important to note that this is not the first time Mr. Jones’ address has been called into question. Not included in the Coffield complaint is a report that Jones was previously found to be using the Mayfair Crossing property as his voting address improperly. In 2003, *Daily Report* writer R. Robing McDonald reported that Jones, having moved to a Buckhead condominium, continued to vote at Fairington Elementary School in Lithonia:

For two years after he moved to Buckhead, DeKalb Chief Executive Officer Vernon A. Jones continued to claim a South DeKalb house as his voting address.

Jones sold his Lithonia house in August 2001 and then settled into a Buckhead condominium he had bought the previous May. But he continued--through four elections--to vote at his former precinct at Fairington Elementary School in Lithonia, Jones acknowledged in a statement he issued Thursday through an assistant.

After inquiries by the Daily Report, Jones' staff said he changed his voter registration on Monday (July 21, 2003) from 5560 Mayfair Crossing Drive to the Peachtree Road condo where he has lived for the past two years. (Published July 23, 2003)

But did Mr. Jones actually change his registration? And if he did, how did it revert back to a house he’d sold?

In 2016, Jones ran successfully for House District 91, using P.O. Box 723, Lithonia, GA 30058 as his filing address with the Secretary of State’s office, presumably with the Mayfair Crossing property as his voting address. There was no challenge to his residency at the time, nor was there one when he ran for re-election in 2018.

However, Jones’ withdrawal this year wasn’t his first. In 2012, using the Mayfair Crossing address, he filed to run in House District 94. On May 26, Andre Walker reported on the *Georgia Unfiltered* website that Jones did not live in House District 94 and invited people to fill out a ready-made challenge form. Three days later, Mr. Jones withdrew from the race, citing “conflict of interest” involving a client, with no mention of another issue, but the timing is uncanny.

### **Action needed**

While the typical challenge is filed during a candidate’s first campaign for an office, the potential consequences for a challenged incumbent are more serious. There are legal consequences for false swearing, of course, but there’s also this: A successful challenge to an incumbent’s eligibility would, in a properly functioning system, trigger removal from his/her House seat, as well. Since Jones has provided no answer to the questions raised about his eligibility, and due to

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his history in this matter, it is incumbent on the DeKalb Board to address these issues immediately, especially since there are no restrictions against Mr. Jones filing as an independent (unaffiliated) or write-in candidate for House District 91, although the challenge could be refiled, of course.

It's important to resolve the issue of Rep. Jones' legal residency to restore the faith of voters in House District 91—and all DeKalb citizens—in the county's elections process. The board's role in this should not be that of a passive audience. Indeed, it's important for you to ask and answer the question: Why did Mr. Jones use a voting address he publicly claimed he'd abandoned? Board records should show that, and the public has a right to know.

Therefore, the Board should make a determination on Mr. Jones' residency, publish its findings, and share the information with the appropriate state officials, including the Secretary of State, Gov. Brian Kemp, and House Speaker David Ralston, for use in determining Rep. Jones' eligibility should he attempt to re-qualify as a candidate for House District 91, as well as his eligibility to continue serving as a state representative.

Silence and inaction from the Board in this matter is not acceptable.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Grant