



TIM GRIFFIN

ATTORNEY GENERAL OF ARKANSAS

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Attorney General Griffin Arrests Three Noncitizens Who Voted Illegally in Arkansas

Griffin: 'Arkansas's elections are sound and secure, which is why we deal swiftly and decisively when rare infractions like these come to our attention'

LITTLE ROCK – Attorney General Tim Griffin issued the following statement announcing the arrests of three noncitizens for illegally voting in Arkansas elections:

“Investigators in my office have arrested three noncitizens for illegally voting in our elections despite not having the status to do so. Arkansas’s elections are sound and secure, which is why we deal swiftly and decisively when rare infractions like these come to our attention. I am committed to preserving the integrity of our democratic process.

“This investigation began earlier this year when federal officials notified us about certain voters in Arkansas whose voting records appeared to be incongruent with their citizenship status. We worked with Homeland Security Investigations, U.S. Department of Homeland Security and determined there to be three individuals whose conduct warranted further investigation, which led us to the arrests made this week.

“Cecilia Castellanos, 59, of Rogers was arrested and charged with one count of perjury, a Class C felony, and one Class D felony count for violating Arkansas’s election laws. Castellanos is a Cuban national who has a pending order of removal by an immigration judge from 1999. She also has three prior felony convictions in New York state. Her perjury charge stems from her marking on a voter registration form that she was a citizen of the United States and that she did

not have any prior felony convictions. The election law violation arises from her illegally voting in the 2024 general election despite not being a U.S. citizen.

“Zlata Risley, 50, of Hot Springs Village was arrested and charged with one Class D felony count for violating Arkansas’s election laws. Risley, who is originally from Kazakhstan, is a lawful permanent resident of the United States but is not a U.S. citizen. She voted illegally on February 28, 2024, in the Republican preferential primary.

“Chi Baum, 59, of Texarkana was arrested and charged with one count of perjury, a Class C felony, and one Class D felony count for violating Arkansas’s election laws. Baum, who is originally from Nigeria, is a conditional permanent resident, but she is not a U.S. citizen. Her perjury charge stems from her marking on a voter registration form that she was a citizen of the United States. The election law violation arises from her illegally voting in the 2024 general election despite not being a U.S. citizen.

“I am grateful for the excellent work done on these cases by my Special Investigations Division’s Election Integrity Unit, and am also grateful for the assistance of Secretary of State Cole Jester, 19th Judicial District West Prosecuting Attorney Bryan Sexton, 18th Judicial District East Prosecuting Attorney Michelle Lawrence, and 8th Judicial District South Prosecuting Attorney Connie Mitchell.”

Jester added the following statement:

“American elections are for American citizens. Anything less is totally unacceptable. I am deeply thankful for Attorney General Tim Griffin’s diligent investigation of these crimes, and I am proud to have partnered with his team. We will always fight to keep Arkansas number one in the country for election security.”

About Attorney General Tim Griffin

Tim Griffin was sworn in as the 57th Attorney General of Arkansas on January 10, 2023, having previously served as the state’s 20th Lieutenant Governor from 2015-2023. From 2011-2015, Griffin served as the 24th representative of Arkansas’s Second Congressional District, where he served on the House Committee on Ways and Means, House Armed Services Committee, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, House Committee on Ethics and House Committee on the Judiciary while also serving as a Deputy Whip for the Majority.

Griffin is currently an officer in the Arkansas Army National Guard and holds the rank of colonel. Griffin served as an officer in the U.S. Army Reserve Judge Advocate General's (JAG) Corps for more than 28 years. In 2005, Griffin was mobilized to active duty as an Army prosecutor at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and served with the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) in Mosul, Iraq.

His previous assignments include serving as the Commander of the 2d Legal Operations Detachment in New Orleans, Louisiana; the Commander of the 134th Legal Operations Detachment at Fort Bragg, North Carolina; and as a Senior Legislative Advisor to the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness at the Pentagon. Griffin earned a master's degree in strategic studies as a Distinguished Honor Graduate from the U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania.

Griffin also served as U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Arkansas, and Special Assistant to the President and Deputy Director of Political Affairs for President George W. Bush; Special Assistant to Assistant Attorney General Michael Chertoff, Criminal Division, U.S. Department of Justice; Special Assistant U.S. Attorney, U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of Arkansas; Senior Investigative Counsel, Government Reform and Oversight Committee, U.S. House of Representatives; and Associate Independent Counsel, Office of Independent Counsel David M. Barrett, In re: HUD Secretary Henry Cisneros.

Griffin is a graduate of Magnolia High School, Hendrix College in Conway, and Tulane Law School in New Orleans. He attended graduate school at Oxford University. He is admitted to practice law in Arkansas (active) and Louisiana (inactive). Griffin lives in Little Rock with his wife, Elizabeth, a Camden native, and their three children.

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