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Four members of an election board were charged Monday with intimidating voters, casting bogus ballots, and falsely certifying the results in their polling place during a March 21 special election for the state House's 197th District.

Those charged include Dolores Shaw, 61; Calvin Mattox, 52; Thurman George, 57; and Wallace Hill, 60. The four — all Democrats — manned the ballot machines at the Esperanza Health Center at Kensington and Allegheny Avenues in the 43rd Ward, one of the polling places where complaints about illegal electioneering were lodged.

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Attorney General Josh Shapiro said the charges should “draw a very clear line ahead of next week’s election.”

One elderly couple, both Republicans, cast their ballots together, but only one of the votes was recorded, while the other appeared to have been replaced with a write-in vote for the Democrat in the race, Shapiro said.

A voter intending to cast a ballot for the Green Party candidate was told the ballot machine was broken and later was cursed at when he returned to try again, Shapiro said. Another voter supporting the Green Party candidate was aggressively questioned when he tried to bring someone into the polling booth to assist him, as allowed by law.

“One should not chalk these actions up to typical partisanship or typical electioneering,” Shapiro said. “These were crimes.” The actions did not change the election’s result, he said.

Emilio Vazquez, the Democratic leader of the 43rd Ward, easily won the special election despite having to run a write-in campaign. He was sworn into office April 5 and will have to seek reelection to a full two-year term next year. He declined to comment Monday.

That result prompted a civil lawsuit in federal court by Republican nominee Lucinda Little, Green Party nominee Cheri Honkala, and two other candidates seeking to overturn the special election’s results.

Among the claims in that suit, which is pending: election board workers engaged in or allowed pro-Vazquez electioneering in several polling places, and permitted nonvoters to follow voters uninvited into polling booths.

Dozens of complaints to the Philadelphia District Attorney’s Office on Election Day prompted an investigation that was soon joined by the attorney general.

Philadelphia District Attorney Kelley Hodge on Monday called the election board actions “a ruthless example of why so many of our fellow citizens are skeptical and distrustful of our elections.”

Shaw, who was judge of elections at the polling place, faces six felonies and four misdemeanors. Mattox, a minority inspector, faces six felonies and five misdemeanors. George, a machine inspector, faces five felonies and three misdemeanors. Hill, a translator, faces six felonies and four misdemeanors. They could receive prison time on the most serious charges, if convicted.

Vazquez was not the Democratic Party’s first pick. A judge removed the first Democratic nominee, Frederick Ramirez, ruling that he did not live in the district. The same judge later found that the party’s effort to replace Ramirez with Vazquez came after the deadline to place names on the ballot. Little was the only candidate listed on the ballot.

Honkala, an anti-poverty activist who ran as the Green Party’s nominee for vice president in 2012, also missed the deadline to get on the ballot in the 197th District. She, like Vazquez and two others, ran as a write-in candidate.

Vazquez won 73.5 percent of the vote, while Honkala took 10.5 percent. Little received 7.4 percent and Acosta and Lloyd split 8.6 percent.

Despite the controversy, the special election drew little interest from voters. Just 6.9 percent of voters in the district, where registration is 85 percent Democratic, cast ballots.

The election workers charged could not be reached or did not respond to requests for comment. – ***Philadelphia Inquirer***

