

SUPREME COURT OF ARIZONA

MAUREEN HOPPE, ) Arizona Supreme Court  
 ) No. CV-26-0114-AP/EL  
 Plaintiff/Appellant, )  
 ) Maricopa County  
 v. ) Superior Court  
 ) No. CV2026-013760  
BOBBI BUCHLI, et al., )  
 ) **FILED 05/04/2026**  
 Defendants/Appellees. )  
\_\_\_\_\_ )

**DECISION ORDER**

A panel consisting of Chief Justice Timmer, Justice Montgomery, Justice King, and Justice Cruz has considered this matter.

Plaintiff Maureen Hoppe seeks to enjoin Defendant Bobbi Buchli's candidacy for Gilbert Town Council. She claims that two flaws in the caption of her nomination petitions independently prevent her from appearing on the 2026 primary election ballot. The trial court found that Plaintiff failed to show the petitions were not in substantial compliance with Arizona law. For the following reasons, we affirm the trial court's decision.

We review a challenge to the content of a nomination petition to determine whether it substantially complies with the statutory requirements. *Lohr v. Bolick*, 249 Ariz. 428, 431 ¶ 7 (2020). This entails discerning whether the petitions "could confuse or mislead" electors. *Moreno v. Jones*, 213 Ariz. 94, 102 ¶ 42 (2006). "Because the statute allows a measure of inconsistency by only requiring substantial compliance, no mere irregularity can be considered,

unless it be shown that the result has been affected by such irregularity." *Id.* (citation modified). The Court will "not remove candidates from the ballot for mere technical departures from the form." *Bee v. Day*, 218 Ariz. 505, 506 ¶ 10 (2008). The Court uses this standard unless presented with a "clear statement that the legislature intended a particular form requirement" to be critical. *Id.*

A.R.S. § 16-314(C) provides the nomination petition caption for nonpartisan elections:

I, the undersigned, a qualified elector of the county of \_\_\_\_\_, state of Arizona, and of (here name political division or district from which the nomination is sought) hereby nominate \_\_\_\_\_ who resides at \_\_\_\_\_ in the county of \_\_\_\_\_ for the office of \_\_\_\_\_ to be voted at the \_\_\_\_\_ election to be held \_\_\_\_\_, and hereby declare that I am qualified to vote for this office . . . .

Here, the parties agree that for two sets of petitions, Defendant filled in the caption as follows:

I, the undersigned, a qualified elector of the county of Maricopa, state of Arizona, and of LD 14 Town of Gilbert hereby nominate BOBBI BUCHLI who resides at 3573 E MEADOWVIEW Dr Gilbert, Az 85298 in the county of Maricopa for the office of Gilbert Town Council to be voted at the primary election to be held July 21, 2026, and hereby declare that I am qualified to vote for this office . . . .

(Emphasis added).

I, the undersigned, a qualified elector of the county of Maricopa, state of Arizona, and of Town of Gilbert hereby nominate BOBBI BUCHLI who resides at 3573 E MEADOWVIEW Dr Gilbert, Az 85298 in the county of Maricopa for the office of Gilbert Town Council to be voted at the 2026 election to be held Aug 4, 2026, and hereby declare that I am qualified to vote for this office . . . .

(Emphasis added). The parties also agree that if either set of petitions is disqualified, Defendant will lack sufficient signatures to qualify for the primary ballot.

Plaintiff makes two arguments. First, she claims that stating "LD 14 Town of Gilbert" could cause electors who live in Legislative District 14, but not the Town of Gilbert, to wrongly believe they are qualified. The parties agree that Legislative District 14 and the Town of Gilbert, while overlapping, do not share the same borders. Second, she asserts that by writing "2026" Defendant failed to specify that the signatures are for the primary election, thereby confusing electors. That particular blank, she claims, must be filled with either "primary" or "general." For support, she points to § 16-314(C)'s caption for partisan nominations, which has no blank and simply says "primary."

As to the first argument, Plaintiff has not identified any defective signatures from outside the relevant jurisdiction, and she claims she does not have to because the caption is facially defective. However, even if there is an irregularity in a petition, it is Plaintiff's burden to show that the irregularity has affected the results. See *Moreno*, 213 Ariz. at 102 ¶ 42. In addition, as the trial court noted, any geographic ambiguity is clarified by the petitions' identification of the office at stake, "Gilbert Town Council." She therefore fails to show that the first set of petitions are not in substantial compliance.

As to the second argument, although Plaintiff has offered the inference that "2026" should actually say "primary" or "general," she has not identified any clear statement from the Legislature mandating those terms. See *Bee*, 218 Ariz. at 506 ¶ 10. The Court notes that after "2026" the petitions accurately identify the primary election date.<sup>1</sup> Plaintiff fails to show that electors who read the whole caption would be confused as to whether Defendant is seeking signatures for the primary election.

Accordingly,

**IT IS ORDERED** affirming the trial court's ruling.

**IT IS FURTHER ORDERED** directing the Clerk to issue the mandate forthwith.

DATED this 4th day of May, 2026.

\_\_\_\_\_  
/s/  
ANN A. SCOTT TIMMER  
Chief Justice

---

<sup>1</sup> Due to a legislative change, the primary was moved from August 4 to July 21. See A.R.S. § 16-201; H.B. 2022, 57th Leg., 2d Reg. Sess. (Ariz. 2026).

TO:

James E Barton II

Jacqueline Mendez Soto

Charles Lucking

Joshua A Barro

Timothy A LaSota

Christopher W Payne

Rosa Aguilar Dhakal

Brett A Gibson

Nancy Rodriguez

Hon John L Blanchard