

# 6 candidates file — just in case — for school board

## U.S. hasn't ruled on election law

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Six would-be school board candidates filed petitions with the Board of Elections yesterday, even though state lawmakers canceled this year's election.

The U.S. Justice Department has not yet cleared a controversial law to postpone school board elections from this May until May 1993, forcing candidates to play it safe.

Under the Voting Rights Act, the Justice Department is required to review any changes in election procedures that may affect the rights of minority voters.

It's not clear, however, how the review would affect Staten Island.

The Island does not fall under the jurisdiction of the Voting Rights Act. According to a letter sent by the Board of Elections to all candidates, in New York City, the act only covers Brooklyn, Manhattan and the Bronx.

Island candidates said their petitions are insurance against a change in the law, not signs of hope that the law will be changed.

In postponing the elections, the current law also extends the three-year terms of current Staten Island Community School Board members.

School board hopefuls and current board members were miffed by the confused status of the elections.

"The ultimate in final indignities, a true Hobson's choice," said Arden Heights resident Steve Storman, a vice president for Merrill Lynch who filed his petitions yesterday. "The choice is file and there might be an election or don't file and take your chances."

Storman laughed when he was told only six candidates filed petitions for the nine school board seats before the midnight deadline.

"Then if there's an election, I guess I'll win," he said. "What happens if you hold an election and nobody shows up?"

The only non-incumbent to file petitions, Storman submitted more signatures — 680 — than any other Island candidate.

School board chairwoman Olivia Brennan and board members Jerry Cammarata, Ellen Trapp, Eleanor Conforti and Jane Tardell also submitted petitions.

Board member Lillian Popp did not file her petitions, although she had gathered signatures in January.

"I assumed it was an exercise in futility. It seemed to have been a fait accompli," she said of the

postponed elections.

Cammarata, who filed petitions with 422 signatures, said, "Better safe than sorry. And we had already done all the legwork."

Mrs. Trapp, who filed 312 signatures, agreed.

"We're between a rock and a hard place," she said. "If you fail to file and the Justice Department insists it's a violation, then what do we do? And I also feel that if people had gone out and asked people to sign petitions in my favor, the least I could do is to file them."

Gov. Mario M. Cuomo signed the postponement law in January, saying that the 12-month delay would give Albany time to craft new district lines, replace paper ballots with machine voting, and implement education reforms.

But there are no guarantees that any education reforms will be enacted before May 1993.

In a letter dated Jan. 27, the Board of Elections informed candidates that this year's elections had been canceled.

That notice drew sharp criticism from the Community Service Society, a Manhattan-based organization that charged the Board of Elections with breaking federal laws by failing to obtain clearance from the U.S. Justice Department prior to postponing the election. The society plans to legally challenge the postponement.

In a Feb. 4 letter sent to candidates in all five boroughs, the Board of Elections said it "does not consider the legislation to be legally effective until precleared by the U.S. Department of Justice in accordance with the Voting Rights Act."

The letter continued, "Of course it is us up to the individual candidates to determine whether they wish to file petitions with the Board."

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