

# Illinois Official Reports

## Appellate Court

<p><b><i>Bass v. Township Officers Electoral Board for Rich Township,</i></b> <b>2025 IL App (1st) 250092</b></p>
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Appellate Court  
Caption

ANTOINE BASS, Petitioner-Appellant, v. THE TOWNSHIP OFFICERS ELECTORAL BOARD FOR RICH TOWNSHIP; JACQUELYN SMALL, Substitute Chairman; NICHOLAS BOBIS, Member; ARLENE “SUGAR” AL-MIN, Member; and ETHEL C. NICHOLAS, Objector, Respondents-Appellees.

District & No.

First District, Sixth Division  
No. 1-25-0092

Filed

March 10, 2025

Decision Under  
Review

Appeal from the Circuit Court of Cook County, No. 2024-COEL-44; the Hon. Mary S. Trew, Judge, presiding.

Judgment

Circuit court reversed; Electoral Board reversed.

Counsel on  
Appeal

McStephen O.A. Solomon, of Hazel Crest, for appellant.

Steven M. Laduzinsky and Ryley King, of Laduzinsky & Associates, P.C., of Chicago, for appellee Ethel C. Nicholas.

No brief filed for other appellees.

Panel

PRESIDING JUSTICE TAILOR delivered the judgment of the court, with opinion.

Justices Hyman and Mikva concurred in the judgment and opinion.

## OPINION

¶ 1 Appellant, Antoine Bass, appeals from the Township Officers Electoral Board for Rich Township (Board) ruling striking his name from the ballot as a candidate for the office of supervisor of Rich Township. Bass argues that his name should not have been stricken from the ballot because there was no evidence of a pattern of fraud or false swearing in his nomination papers in violation of the Election Code (10 ILCS 5/1-1 *et seq.* (West 2022)). For the following reasons, we reverse the Board’s ruling.

### ¶ 2 I. BACKGROUND

¶ 3 On November 18, 2024, Bass filed his nomination papers as an independent candidate for election to the office of supervisor of Rich Township, Cook County, Illinois, at the consolidated general election to be held on April 1, 2025. Bass’s nomination papers included his statement of candidacy, a receipt of filing for his statement of economic interest, and 77 petition sheets containing signatures of voters to nominate him.

¶ 4 On November 25, 2024, Ethel C. Nicholas filed her objections to Bass’s nomination papers with the Rich Township clerk. She alleged that Bass’s nomination papers violated the Election Code (*id.*) in that they contained petition sheets (1) with the names of persons who are not registered to vote at the addresses shown opposite their respective names, (2) with the names of persons who did not sign the sheets “in their own proper persons” and that the signatures “are not genuine and are forgeries,” (3) with the names of persons who reside outside the district, (4) with the names of persons whose addresses are missing or incomplete, (5) with the names of persons who have signed the nomination petition more than one time, (6) with “a circulator[’]s affidavit containing the name of Antoine Bass as the Circulator and said circulator affidavit is false” because Bass did not circulate the sheets and did not personally witness every person sign his or her name, and (7) with less than the statutorily required number of signatures to be placed on the ballot. Nicholas alleged that Bass engaged in a pattern of fraud and false swearing.

¶ 5 On December 3, 2024, the Board was convened, composed of Jacquelyn Small, Nicholas Bobis, and Arlene “Sugar” Al-Min. On December 9, 2024, a records examination of Bass’s nomination papers was conducted by the office of the Clerk of Cook County (County Clerk). The County Clerk determined that Bass had 763 signatures that could be counted. The total number of signatures deemed valid after the records examination was 574. The total number of signatures required by law for placement on the ballot for the office in question was 477. Therefore, Bass had 97 more signatures than required by law to be placed on the ballot.

¶ 6 On December 18, 2024, a public hearing was held before the Board. Nicholas called Bass as a witness. Bass testified that he submitted 77 signature pages with his nomination papers. Bass stated that other people were supposed to circulate nominating petition sheets for him but he only received one back. Thus, Bass circulated all but one of the 77 petition sheets, and those 76 sheets had Bass’s signature as the circulator. Bass stated that he witnessed each person sign

the petition sheet. In addition, all of the petition sheets contained his signature as the circulator. However, on some of the petition sheets objected to by Nicholas, the name of the circulator and the address of the circulator were printed in different handwriting. Bass testified that the different handwriting was “a mixture of my mother and my sister because when we was— when I was getting it signed, there was so many of them for the notary so I could not do it in front of the notary so they helped me fill that part in and I signed it.” Bass was unable to distinguish between his mother’s and sister’s handwriting. On cross-examination, Bass testified that there could have been a third person who helped him print his name and address in the circulator’s affidavit “because one of these things doesn’t really match. I’m not sure.” On redirect examination, Bass was asked specifically about petition sheet number 72, the one sheet he did not circulate. Bass agreed that the signatures on this petition sheet were all in black ink and had the same type of handwriting. Many of the signatures on this page had the surname Baggett, and the circulator’s surname was Baggett. At the conclusion of Bass’s testimony, the case was continued to December 27, 2024, for the parties to file closing briefs and for the Board’s decision.

¶ 7 On December 27, 2024, the Board’s attorney informed the Board that it had two options: “One option is to sustain the objector’s petition and rule the candidate’s name off the ballot, and the second option is to overrule the objector’s petition and rule that the candidate’s name shall appear on the ballot.” As to the first option, the Board was reminded of Bass’s testimony that he circulated 76 of the 77 petitions that he submitted and that his mother and sister helped him fill out his name and address on the circulator’s affidavit. The Board’s attorney then noted Nicholas’s closing argument that the

“results of the records exam conducted by the Cook County clerk’s office found 18 of his petition sheets, Page 4, 12, 14, 16, 18, 19, 20, 31, 38, 42 to 45, 50, 59, 61, and 77 of the candidate’s purported valid signatures had \*\*\* four or more invalid signatures on each sheet. So basically what that means is, of the ten signatures on each sheet, at least four of them were found not to be the signer’s genuine signature.”

As for the second option, the Board was informed that it should overrule the objector’s petition and rule that Bass’s name shall appear on the ballot, “if the Board finds that the candidate was credible and actually witnessed each and every signature he allegedly obtained and circulated all 76 sheets and that he signed the circulator’s affidavit being truthful.” Thereafter, the Board voted to sustain “paragraphs 7 [pattern of fraud] and 8 [false swearing] of objector’s petition and find the candidate’s name shall not appear on the ballot.”

¶ 8 The Board’s written order stated that it found “that the preponderance of the evidence in the record favors Objector.” The Board found that Bass’s testimony was not credible and that his testimony included “contradictions and statements that are contrary to the findings by the Cook County Clerk’s office findings pursuant to the Records Examination.” As to paragraphs 7 and 8 of Nicholas’s objection, pattern of fraud and false swearing, the Board stated that Bass swore to the “validity and genuineness of the signatures contained in his petition sheets” but “the Cook County Clerk found otherwise.” The Board found that Bass “could not have observed each and every person sign his petition sheets” because “189 lines were found invalid which is approximately 25% of all the signatures submitted” and “85 signatures were found invalid as ‘not genuine’ signatures, or forgeries, which is approximately 15% of all of the signatures submitted.” The Board further noted that Bass was unable to identify his mother’s and sister’s handwriting. The Board ruled that Bass engaged in a “pattern of fraud and false

swearing, and the petition sheets circulated by the Candidate should be stricken in their entirety.”

¶ 9 On December 27, 2024, Bass filed his petition for judicial review of the Board’s decision. Bass argued that the Board’s findings and decision were unsupported by the facts and evidence, as there was no evidence to support Nicholas’s claim that Bass did not circulate his petitions. Nicholas responded that the evidence, which included Bass’s own testimony, the 76 petition sheets bearing the handwriting of at least three people other than Bass, and the results of the records examination, supported the Board’s finding that Bass did not circulate his petitions.

¶ 10 On January 16, 2025, the circuit court conducted a hearing on Bass’s petition for judicial review. Thereafter, the court entered a written decision affirming the Board’s ruling sustaining Nicholas’s objection to Bass’s nomination papers. On January 17, 2025, Bass filed his notice of appeal, and on January 27, 2025, we granted Bass’s motion to expedite this matter due to the imminency of the general election.

¶ 11 II. ANALYSIS

¶ 12 Before reaching the merits of Bass’s appeal, we first address the Board’s contention that we lack jurisdiction. In a motion to strike portions of Bass’s memorandum in lieu of brief, the Board points out that the date of the order Bass identifies in his notice of appeal is January 16, 2024, which is exactly one year before the circuit court denied Bass’s petition for judicial review on January 16, 2025. Nowhere in Bass’s notice of appeal does he indicate that he is appealing the circuit court’s January 16, 2025, order.

¶ 13 Illinois Supreme Court Rule 303(b)(2) (eff. July 1, 2017) provides that a notice of appeal “shall specify the judgment or part thereof or other orders appealed from and the relief sought from the reviewing court.” The filing of a notice of appeal is “the jurisdictional step which initiates appellate review.” (Internal quotation marks omitted.) *General Motors Corp. v. Pappas*, 242 Ill. 2d 163, 176 (2011). “Unless there is a properly filed notice of appeal, the appellate court lacks jurisdiction over the matter and is obliged to dismiss the appeal.” *Id.* “A notice of appeal confers jurisdiction on a court of review to consider only the judgments or parts of judgments specified in the notice of appeal.” *Id.*

¶ 14 “[N]otices of appeal should be liberally construed.” *Burtell v. First Charter Service Corp.*, 76 Ill. 2d 427, 435 (1979). Clerical errors in a notice of appeal do not necessarily render the notice defective. See *In re Marriage of Ramsey*, 339 Ill. App. 3d 752, 755-56 (2003) (excusing incorrect date of order being appealed because the correct date appeared elsewhere on the notice); *People v. Bennett*, 144 Ill. App. 3d 184, 185 (1986) (excusing incorrect case number on *pro se* notice of appeal because the proper case was identified in the body of the notice). Here, there can be no dispute that the notice of appeal contains a typographical error. Notwithstanding the fact that the incorrect year of the circuit court’s order is listed on the notice of appeal, we hold that the notice was sufficient to confer jurisdiction to review the order entered by the circuit court on January 16, 2025. We therefore deny the Board’s motion to strike but allow the Board to file its memorandum in lieu of brief in support of its decision.

¶ 15 Moving to the merits, where a circuit court has reviewed an electoral board’s decision, we review the board’s decision and not the decision of the circuit court. *Burns v. Municipal Officers Electoral Board of Elk Grove Village*, 2020 IL 125714, ¶ 10.

¶ 16 Bass argues that, because the facts in this case are “established and undisputed,” we should apply a *de novo* standard of review where the only question raised is whether “the governing legal provisions were properly interpreted and correctly applied by the electoral board.” Nicholas and the Board disagree and argue that this court is presented with a mixed question of law and fact and, therefore, the correct standard of review is whether the Board’s decision is clearly erroneous. Nicholas and the Board contend that, because the Board was required to assess Bass’s credibility as to whether he personally circulated 76 of the 77 petition sheets, it necessarily made factual findings and then was required to determine whether he violated the Election Code.

¶ 17 An electoral board is viewed as an administrative agency, and therefore the standard of review we apply depends on the type of question being reviewed. *Cinkus v. Village of Stickney Municipal Officers Electoral Board*, 228 Ill. 2d 200, 210 (2008). An electoral board’s “findings and conclusions on questions of fact are deemed *prima facie* true and correct.” *Harned v. Evanston Municipal Officers Electoral Board*, 2020 IL App (1st) 200314, ¶ 12. Where an appeal presents a question of fact, we will not overturn the board’s decision unless it is against the manifest weight of the evidence. *Cinkus*, 228 Ill. 2d at 210. A factual finding is “against the manifest weight of the evidence if the opposite conclusion is clearly evident.” *Id.* Where the appeal presents a question of law, our review is *de novo*. *Id.* And where the appeal concerns a mixed question of law and fact, the board’s decision will not be disturbed unless it is clearly erroneous. *Id.* at 211. A finding is “clearly erroneous” “only where the reviewing court, on the entire record, is ‘left with the definite and firm conviction that a mistake has been committed.’ ” *AFM Messenger Service, Inc. v. Department of Employment Security*, 198 Ill. 2d 380, 395 (2001) (quoting *United States v. United States Gypsum Co.*, 333 U.S. 364, 395 (1948)). We agree with Nicholas and the Board that this appeal concerns a mixed question of law and fact. Therefore, we will overturn the Board’s findings only if they are clearly erroneous.

¶ 18 Bass argues that Nicholas did not meet her burden of proof regarding the allegations of a pattern of fraud and false swearing because she presented “no evidence whatsoever, except call[ing] the candidate for questioning.” Bass argues that he testified credibly that he circulated 76 of the 77 petition sheets contained in his nomination papers; that he witnessed the signers of his petitions sign them; that the handwritten parts of the circulator’s statement printed at the bottom of the 76 sheets he circulated were completed by him, his sister, and his mother; and that he signed all the statements in the presence of a notary public with his sister and mother present. He claims that the Board’s decision was unsupported by evidence and “completely ignored the undisputed and un rebutted fact that 75% of the candidate’s petition were found to be valid.”

¶ 19 Nicholas argues that she proved by clear and convincing evidence that Bass engaged in a pattern of fraud and false swearing in that he did not personally see each signer sign the petition sheets and did not personally circulate each of the petition sheets. Nicholas claims that, although 574 of the signatures Bass filed were found to be valid and he technically had 97 more signatures than the statutory required minimum, she presented sufficient evidence to support the Board’s finding that Bass engaged in a pattern of fraud and false swearing sufficient to invalidate all of Bass’s petitions.

¶ 20 Two principles help inform our analysis. First, “ ‘ballot [access] is a substantial right and not to be lightly denied.’ ” *Solomon v. Scholefield*, 2015 IL App (1st) 150685, ¶ 16 (quoting *Siegel v. Lake County Officers Electoral Board*, 385 Ill. App. 3d 452, 460-61 (2008)). Second,

in a proceeding to contest a nominating petition, the objector bears the burden of proof (*id.* ¶ 28; *Carlasare v. Will County Officers Electoral Board*, 2012 IL App (3d) 120699, ¶ 15), which in a case alleging a pattern of fraud or false swearing under the Election Code, as here, must be proven by clear and convincing evidence. See *Muldrow v. Barron*, 2021 IL App (1st) 210248, ¶ 28; *Raila v. Cook County Officers Electoral Board*, 2018 IL App (1st) 180400-U, ¶¶ 37, 41. That is because the presumption in cases charging fraud is that all persons are honest. *Cintuc, Inc. v. Kozubowski*, 230 Ill. App. 3d 969, 974-75 (1992)). Fraud is not presumed; rather, it must be proved by clear and convincing evidence. *Id.* “ ‘If the motives and designs of the parties charged with fraud or collusion may be traced to an honest and legitimate source equally as to a corrupt one, the former explanation ought to be preferred.’ ” *Id.* (quoting *McKenna v. Mickelberry*, 242 Ill. 117, 134 (1909)) (finding no evidence of fraud in circulator’s petitions where notary public erroneously printed his name in the space reserved for the name of the circulator).

¶ 21 Section 7-10 of the Election Code requires nomination papers to include a circulator’s signed, sworn statement certifying “that the signatures on this sheet *were signed in my presence*, and *are genuine*, and that to the best of my knowledge and belief the persons so signing were at the time of signing the petitions qualified voters.” (Emphases added.) 10 ILCS 5/7-10 (West 2022); *Cunningham v. Schaefflein*, 2012 IL App (1st) 120529, ¶ 22. “The affidavit requirement is a mandatory requirement of the Election Code,” and signatures collected in violation of those requirements are invalid. *Cunningham*, 2012 IL App (1st) 120529, ¶ 23; *Crossman v. Board of Election Commissioners of Chicago*, 2012 IL App (1st) 120291, ¶ 11. In certain instances, evidence of a pattern of fraud and false swearing in a candidate’s nominating petitions can be a basis to invalidate all the candidate’s petition sheets, resulting in the candidate’s removal from the ballot. See, e.g., *Harmon v. Town of Cicero Municipal Officers Electoral Board*, 371 Ill. App. 3d 1111, 1116 (2007).

¶ 22 The evidence at the hearing before the Board consisted of the records examination conducted by the County Clerk and Bass’s testimony. The results of the records examination found that Bass submitted petition sheets that contained invalid signatures. The County Clerk did not classify any of the invalid signatures as fraudulent or forgeries in any way. Bass does not contest the validity of those signatures. Bass testified that he personally circulated 76 of the 77 petition sheets, personally witnessed each person sign, and then signed those petition sheets as the circulator before a notary. Bass acknowledged that the one petition sheet that he did not circulate contained signatures in similar handwriting.

¶ 23 The Board found that “the petition sheets submitted by [Bass], as circulator, evidence a pattern of fraud, false swearing, and total disregard for the requirements of the Election Code.” The Board found that Bass was not credible. As evidence of a pattern of fraud and false swearing, the Board relied on Bass’s testimony that his mother and sister helped him complete the circulator’s affidavit in his petition sheets but that he was unable to distinguish between “his mother’s and sister’s handwriting.” It further found that Bass’s contention, that the signatures contained on his petition sheets were valid and genuine as required by section 7-10 of the Election Code (10 ILCS 5/7-10 (West 2022)), was contradicted the County Clerk’s findings that many of the signatures Bass obtained were invalid. The Board concluded that, because Bass’s petitions contained invalid signatures, “it [was] obvious” that Bass “could not have seen every person sign the petition sheet” because 85 signatures were found to be “not

genuine,” which the Board deemed “forgeries.” Moreover, the signatures on the one sheet that Bass did not circulate were all in the same handwriting and “totally forged.”

¶ 24 An electoral board’s findings and decision are considered *prima facie* true and correct. *Samuelson v. Cook County Officers Electoral Board*, 2012 IL App (1st) 120581, ¶ 11. It is the agency’s role to weigh the evidence and to determine the credibility of the witnesses, and we will not substitute the agency’s judgment with our own. *Muldrow*, 2021 IL App (1st) 210248, ¶ 29. Where the decision of the agency is supported by competent evidence in the record, it should be affirmed. *Cinkus*, 228 Ill. 2d at 211.

¶ 25 We cannot affirm the Board’s decision on this record. We find that the Board’s determination that Nicholas proved a pattern of fraud and false swearing by clear and convincing evidence was clearly erroneous. Again, a finding is “clearly erroneous” “only where the reviewing court, on the entire record, is ‘left with the definite and firm conviction that a mistake has been committed.’ ” *AFM Messenger Service, Inc.*, 198 Ill. 2d at 395 (quoting *United States Gypsum Co.*, 333 U.S. at 395). We are firmly convinced that a mistake has been made here, where the Board’s findings were not supported by clear and convincing evidence of a pattern of fraud or false swearing.

¶ 26 First, in finding that Bass engaged in a pattern of fraud and false swearing, the Board relied on the fact that Bass’s mother and sister, and perhaps a third individual, helped him print his name and address in the circulator’s affidavits. Section 10-4 of the Election Code requires:

“At the bottom of each sheet of such petition shall be added a circulator’s statement, signed by a person 18 years of age or older who is a citizen of the United States; stating the street address or rural route number, as the case may be, as well as the county, city, village or town, and state; certifying that the signatures on that sheet of the petition were signed in his or her presence; certifying that the signatures are genuine; and either (1) indicating the dates on which that sheet was circulated, or (2) indicating the first and last dates on which the sheet was circulated, or (3) certifying that none of the signatures on the sheet were signed more than 90 days preceding the last day for the filing of the petition; and certifying that to the best of his knowledge and belief the persons so signing were at the time of signing the petition duly registered voters under Article 4, 5, or 6 of this Code of the political subdivision or district for which the candidate or candidates shall be nominated, and certifying that their respective residences are correctly stated therein. Such statement shall be sworn to before some officer authorized to administer oaths in this State.” 10 ILCS 5/10-4 (West 2022).

There is nothing in section 10-4 of the Election Code (*id.*) that requires a circulator to fill out his or her own attestation before signing it. And nothing about the fact, particularly noted by the Board, that Bass was unable to distinguish his mother’s handwriting from his sister’s handwriting in the attestation forms has any bearing on the truthfulness of Bass’s testimony that he witnessed the signatures himself and signed the attestations accordingly.

¶ 27 Second, the Board found that Bass engaged in a pattern of fraud and false swearing because 85 of the 189 objections were sustained on the basis of “invalid” signatures. Bass testified that he personally circulated 76 of the 77 petitions, personally witnessed each person sign, and then attested to those petition sheets before a notary. No contrary evidence was offered by Nicholas. The Board’s finding that “it [was] obvious” that Bass “could not have seen every person sign the petition sheet” because 85 signatures were found to be “not genuine,” which the Board deemed “forgeries,” was unsupported by any evidence. As previously stated, the County Clerk

made no findings that the signatures it identified as “invalid” were fraudulent or forgeries. Thus, Bass’s testimony was un rebutted.

¶ 28

A finder of fact may not simply reject un rebutted testimony. *Bucktown Partners v. Johnson*, 119 Ill. App. 3d 346, 353-55 (1983) (citing *People ex rel. Brown v. Baker*, 88 Ill. 2d 81, 85 (1981)); *Bazydlo v. Volant*, 164 Ill. 2d 207, 215 (1995). As our supreme court has explained, although “the credibility of witnesses and the weight to be accorded their testimony are typically jury considerations [citations], a jury cannot arbitrarily or capriciously reject the testimony of an unimpeached witness [citations].” *People ex rel. Brown*, 88 Ill. 2d at 85. This is true even though the witness may be an interested party. *Chicago & Alton R.R. Co. v. Gretzner*, 46 Ill. 74, 80 (1867); *Sweilem v. Department of Revenue*, 372 Ill. App. 3d 475, 485 (2007). Here, Nicholas, who had the burden of proof, presented no evidence, let alone clear and convincing evidence, that any of the signatures contained in the 76 petition sheets were fraudulent or forgeries or that Bass lied about circulating and witnessing each signature on the 76 petition sheets. Hence, the Board improperly rejected Bass’s un rebutted testimony in finding that Bass engaged in a pattern of fraud and false signing. See *Bucktown*, 119 Ill. App. 3d at 353-55.

¶ 29

Certainly, there were signatures that were deemed invalid by the County Clerk, but there are a multitude of reasons why a signature can be deemed invalid that are not fraudulent. For example, the signer does not meet the minimum age requirements, is not a United States citizen, does not live within the voting district, is not actually registered to vote, or has incorrectly stated his or her address. And as Bass points out, a signature deemed invalid because it does not match the signature on file with the County Clerk does not necessary imply fraud. In the absence of other evidence, an equally plausible explanation is that the signers were sloppy or did not take the time to sign in the manner that they normally sign. Simply collecting and swearing to signatures that end up being invalid for one reason or another does not amount to a pattern of fraud or false swearing where it is equally possible that an innocent explanation exists. To be sure, a circulator has no reasonable ability to confirm that all of the statutory criteria are met before allowing someone to sign a petition. It is thus common practice, and prudent, to file in excess of (oftentimes by a multiple) the required number of signatures when submitting a nominating petition. Bass filed almost twice the number of signatures required and, following a review of his petition sheets to confirm the validity of the signatures he obtained, still had a sufficient number of valid signatures to appear on the ballot. We recognize that a factfinder could reasonably infer a pattern of fraud or false swearing where there is an unusually high number of signatures that do not match what is on file with the County Clerk. Here, the County Clerk determined, of the 763 signatures Bass submitted in his nominating petitions, 85, or 11.1%, did not match the signatures on file with the County Clerk. However, Nicholas did not submit any evidence to show that this was an unusually high amount. Thus, the Board was left to speculate.

¶ 30

Finally, the Board found that the one petition sheet not circulated by Bass, number 72, was “totally forged” and used this finding to support its conclusion that Bass engaged in a pattern of fraud and false swearing. Nicholas objected to nine of the signatures on that sheet, and eight of the objections were sustained by the County Clerk. Two of the objections were sustained on the basis that the signer was not registered at the address provided, and six were sustained on the basis that the signature did not match the signature on file with the County Clerk. Bass admitted that the signatures contained on this petition sheet appeared to be in the same



handwriting but stated that this was the only petition sheet out of the 77 petition sheets that he did not personally circulate. The Board found that, because Bass was responsible for the petition sheets he turned in and his affidavit could not be believed, all of his petition sheets were invalid.

¶ 31 In excluding all of Bass’s petition sheets, the Board relied on the rule that “[w]here the signature sheets of a nominating petition submitted by a circulator evidence a pattern of fraud, false swearing, and total disregard for the requirements of the [Election] Code, the sheets circulated by that individual should be stricken in their entirety.” *Crossman*, 2012 IL App (1st) 120291, ¶ 11 (citing *Canter v. Cook County Officers Electoral Board*, 170 Ill. App. 3d 364, 368 (1988)). Pattern is defined as “frequent or widespread incidence.” Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pattern> (last visited Mar. 18, 2025) [<https://perma.cc/5PNV-FBMU>]; *cf. Muldrow*, 2021 IL App (1st) 210248, ¶ 30 (“Based on this record, the Board’s finding that petition sheet number six, circulated by [the candidate’s friend], evidenced ‘a pattern of fraud, false swearing, and total disregard for the requirements’ of the Election Code was not error under any standard of review.” (quoting *Crossman*, 2012 IL App (1st) 120291, ¶ 11)). However, accepting that signatures were forged on this one petition sheet does not establish a pattern under the plain and ordinary meaning of the word. Moreover, the remedy in this case is to strike that one sheet, not all of the sheets that Bass submitted. See *Crossman*, 2012 IL App (1st) 120291, ¶ 11; *cf. Huskey v. Municipal Officers Electoral Board for Oak Lawn*, 156 Ill. App. 3d 201, 205 (1987) (entire sheet, not just individual signature, may be struck where there exists a pattern of fraud by circulator). To be clear, Nicholas failed to prove by clear and convincing evidence that Bass engaged in a pattern of fraud and false swearing with respect to the other 76 petition sheets he submitted.

¶ 32 Because Nicholas failed to prove by clear and convincing evidence that Bass engaged in a pattern of fraud and false swearing, the Board’s ruling striking the petition sheets submitted by Bass in their entirety is clearly erroneous. Excluding the 189 signatures as to which the Board sustained Nicholas’s objections based on the Clerk’s signature review, Bass had 571 valid signatures, 97 more than required by law to be placed on the ballot.

### ¶ 33 III. CONCLUSION

¶ 34 Based on the foregoing, we reverse the Board’s decision. Bass has sufficient signatures, and his name shall be placed on the ballot as an independent candidate for election to the office of supervisor of Rich Township, Cook County, Illinois, at the April 1, 2025, consolidated general election.

¶ 35 Circuit court reversed; Electoral Board reversed.