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Judge Throws Out Trump's Attempt to Block Certification of Pennsylvania Election Results, Dashing Hope of Keeping White House

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HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — A federal judge issued a scathing order Saturday dismissing the Trump campaign's futile effort to block the certification of votes in Pennsylvania, shooting down claims of widespread irregularities with mail-in ballots.

The case was always a long shot to stop President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration, but it was President Donald Trump's best hope to affect the election results through the courts, mostly because of the number of electoral votes, 20, at stake in Pennsylvania. His personal attorney, Rudy Giuliani, stepped into a courtroom for the first time in decades to

argue the case this past week.

U.S. District Court Judge Matthew Brann wrote in his order that Trump had asked the court to disenfranchise almost 7 million voters.

“One might expect that when seeking such a startling outcome, a plaintiff would come formidably armed with compelling legal arguments and factual proof of rampant corruption,” Brann wrote, so much that the court would have no option but to stop the certification even though it would impact so many people. “That has not happened.”

Even if he’d won the Pennsylvania case, Trump would have needed to win other lawsuits in other states where he’d also asked to delay certification. The campaign peppered battlegrounds states with litigation in the days after the election alleging widespread election fraud without proof, but the majority of those cases have already been dismissed.

The president has taken his effort to subvert the results of the 2020 election beyond the courtroom in recent days, straight to local lawmakers. Some Trump allies have expressed hope that state lawmakers could intervene in selecting Republican electors.

With that in mind Trump invited Michigan legislators to the White House on Friday, hoping that an Oval Office meeting would persuade them to set aside the popular vote favoring Biden by more than 154,000. But the lawmakers issued a statement after the meeting that they would follow the law and “normal process” on electors. Trump was said to be considering extending a similar invitation to lawmakers from Pennsylvania.

Time is running out for Trump and his campaign, as states certify their results one after another showing that Biden won the requisite 270 Electoral College votes to take office.

Brann ruled that Pennsylvania officials can certify election results that currently show Biden winning the state by more than 80,000 votes. He said the Trump campaign presented “strained legal arguments without merit and speculative accusations ... unsupported by evidence.”

“In the United States of America, this cannot justify the disenfranchisement of a single voter, let alone all the voters of its sixth most populated state,” the opinion said. “Our people, laws, and institutions demand more.”

Trump tweeted after the ruling that he couldn’t understand why Biden was forming a Cabinet when the president’s investigators had found “hundreds of thousands of fraudulent votes,” a baseless claim for which Trump has supplied no evidence.

Giuliani and a Trump campaign lawyer said in a statement that they welcomed the dismissal because it would allow them to appeal up to the U.S. Supreme Court faster, where Trump has repeatedly said he feels he has sympathetic justices. But, the justices heard a case from the state before the election, over a three-day extension on mail-in ballots, and allowed the extension over the objections of the GOP.

Sen. Pat Toomey, a Pennsylvania Republican who had a hand in placing Brann on the bench during the Obama administration, said the ruling showed Trump had exhausted all possible legal avenues in the state and went on to congratulate Biden on his victory. He

called Brann “a longtime conservative Republican whom I know to be a fair and unbiased jurist.”

Giuliani, a former federal prosecutor and New York mayor, showed his rustiness during the hearing this week by tripping himself up over the meaning of “opacity,” mistaking the judge for a federal judge in a separate district and provoking an opposing lawyer.

Giuliani repeatedly contended in court that it was illegal for counties to help people vote. Opposing lawyer Mark Aronchick suggested Giuliani must not know the Pennsylvania election code.

The Trump-aligned attorneys had argued that the U.S. Constitution’s guarantee of equal protection under the law was violated when Pennsylvania counties took different approaches to notifying voters before the election about technical problems with their submitted mail-in ballots.

The judge dismissed the argument entirely.

Pennsylvania Secretary of State Kathy Boockvar and the seven Biden-majority counties that the campaign sued had argued throwing out the popular vote over isolated allegations of mail-in fraud was far too extreme, particularly after most of them have been tallied.

“There is no justification on any level for the radical disenfranchisement they seek,” Boockvar’s lawyers wrote in a brief filed Thursday.

Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro, a Democrat, tweeted shortly after Brann’s ruling that “another one bites the dust.”

“These claims were meritless from the start and for an audience of one,” Shapiro said in a statement. “The will of the people will prevail. These baseless lawsuits need to end.”

Counties must certify their results to Boockvar by Monday, after which she will make her own certification. Democratic Gov. Tom Wolf will notify the winning candidate’s electors they should appear to vote in the Capitol on Dec. 14.