

SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK, APPELLATE DIVISION,
THIRD DEPARTMENT

Sloan v. Kellner

120 A.D.3d 895, 991 N.Y.S.2d 674 (N.Y. App. Div. 2014) · Decided August 21, 2014

SUMMARY

The Appellate Division, Third Department affirmed dismissal of a proceeding challenging the invalidation of a designating petition for statewide Democratic candidates. The court held that the proceeding was jurisdictionally defective because all objectors were not named and served, and rejected the petitioners’ constitutional challenge to the composition of the New York State Board of Elections.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of the State of New York, Appellate Division, Third Department
WRITING FOR THE COURT	McCarthy, J.P.; Garry, J.; Egan Jr., J.; Lynch, J.; Clark, J.
JURISDICTION	New York
DECIDED	August 21, 2014
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Appeal from an order and judgment of the Supreme Court, Albany County, dismissing an Election Law § 16-102 proceeding seeking validation of a designating petition and inclusion of the candidates on the Democratic primary ballot.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	published precedential opinion
PARTIES	Sam Sloan, Nenad Bach, Geeta Rankoth

TOPICS

- election contests
- election law
- equal protection
- appellate procedure
- civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

- election law
- constitutional law
- administrative law
- civil procedure
- appellate procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the Election Law proceeding was jurisdictionally defective because petitioners failed to name and serve all persons who filed objections to the designating petition.
2. Whether the composition of the New York State Board of Elections violated the Equal Protection Clause by failing to give equal weight to each voter.
3. Whether the State Board properly invalidated the designating petition in its entirety for lacking the required number of signatures.

HOLDINGS

1. The proceeding was jurisdictionally defective because petitioners failed to name and serve all persons who filed objections to the designating petition.
2. The composition of the State Board of Elections did not violate the Equal Protection Clause merely because it did not give equal weight to each voter.
3. The State Board properly determined that the designating petition was facially defective and invalid in its entirety because it lacked the required number of signatures to support any of the candidacies.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“the present proceeding is jurisdictionally defective due to the “failure to name and serve all those who filed objections to the designating petition”” (120 A.D.3d at 895)

“the underlying principle of one vote per person does not apply to an appointive board, especially where it is charged with administrative duties” (120 A.D.3d at 895-896)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Petitioners Sam Sloan, Nenad Bach, and Geeta Rankoth submitted a designating petition for Democratic Party candidacies for Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and Comptroller; the petition also nominated Neil V. Grimaldi for Attorney General. Objections to Rankoth's candidacy asserted that the petition contained fewer than one third of the 15,000 signatures required for each candidacy. The New York State Board of Elections invalidated the entire designating petition, after which petitioners sought judicial validation and challenged the Board's composition as unconstitutional.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Petitioners filed a designating petition naming candidates for Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Comptroller, and Attorney General. Objections were filed to Rankoth's candidacy, and the New York State Board of Elections invalidated the petition because it contained fewer than the required number of signatures. Petitioners commenced a proceeding challenging the State Board's composition and seeking ballot access. Supreme Court dismissed the proceeding, and the Appellate Division affirmed.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Matter of Gadsen v. Board of Elections of City of N.Y., 57 N.Y.2d 751, 752 (1982)
- Matter of Biscone v. Scaringe, 59 A.D.2d 794, 794 (1977), aff'd, 42 N.Y.2d 1075 (1977)
- Reynolds v. Sims, 377 U.S. 533, 560-561 (1964)
- Rosenthal v. Board of Education of Central High School District No. 3 of Town of Hempstead, 497 F.2d 726, 729 (2d Cir. 1974)
- Hadley v. Junior College District of Metropolitan Kansas City, 397 U.S. 50, 54 (1970)
- Sailors v. Board of Education of Kent County, 387 U.S. 105, 111 (1967)
- Board of Estimate of City of New York v. Morris, 489 U.S. 688, 694-696 (1989)
- Matter of Hunting v. Power, 54 Misc. 2d 120, 122 (1967), aff'd, 28 A.D.2d 826 (1967), aff'd, 20 N.Y.2d 680 (1967)

OPINION

PER CURIAM.

Per Curiam. Appeal from an order and judgment of the Supreme Court (Ceresia, J.), entered August 15, 2014 in Albany County, which dismissed petitioners' application, in a proceeding pursuant to Election Law § 16-102, to declare valid the designating petition naming petitioners Sam Sloan, Nenad Bach and Geeta Rankoth as Democratic Party candidates for certain statewide public offices in the September 9, 2014 primary election.

Petitioners, Sam Sloan, Nenad Bach and Geeta Rankoth, filed a designating petition nominating them as Democratic Party candidates for the respective public offices of Governor, Lieutenant Governor and Comptroller of the State of New York.

The designating petition further nominates a nonparty, Neil V Grimaldi, as Democratic Party candidate for the public office of Attorney General of the State of New York.* Objections were filed with regard to the candidacy of Rankoth and asserted, among other things, that the petition contained fewer than one third of the 15,000 signatures required for any of the four candidacies (see Election Law § 6-136 [1]).

The New York State Board of Elections agreed and invalidated the designating petition in its entirety. Petitioners thereafter commenced this proceeding seeking a declaration that the State Board's composition is unconstitutional and an order directing that they be included on the primary ballot. Supreme Court dismissed the petition, and petitioners appeal.

We affirm. As Supreme Court properly found, the present proceeding is jurisdictionally defective due to the "failure to name and serve all those who filed objections to the designating petition" (Matter of Gadsen v Board of Elections of City of N.Y., 57 NY2d 751, 752 [1982]; see Matter of Biscone v Scaringe, 59 AD2d 794, 794 [1977], aff'd 42 NY2d 1075 [1977]). *896 Assuming without deciding that the above jurisdictional defect only applies to Rankoth — against whose

candidacy objections were filed — petitioners also argue that the composition of the State Board does not give equal weight to each voter as required by the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment to the US Constitution (see *Reynolds v Sims*, 377 US 533, 560-561 [1964]).

They are incorrect, as the underlying principle of one vote per person does not apply to an appointive board, especially where it is charged with administrative duties (see *Rosenthal v Board of Ed. of Cent. High Sch. Dist. No. 3 of Town of Hempstead*, 497 F2d 726, 729 [2d Cir 1974]; see also *Hadley v Junior College Dist. of Metropolitan Kansas City*, 397 US 50, 54 [1970]; *Sailors v Board of Ed. of Kent County*, 387 US 105, 111 [1967]; compare *Board of Estimate of City of New York v Morris*, 489 US 688, 694-696 [1989]).

The State Board was thus properly constituted, and was free to hold that the designating petition, which lacked the necessary number of signatures to support any of petitioners' candidacies, was facially defective and invalid in its entirety (see Election Law § 6-154 [1]; *Matter of Hunting v Power*, 54 Misc 2d 120, 122 [1967], *affd* 28 AD2d 826 [1967], *affd* 20 NY2d 680 [1967]).

Petitioners' remaining arguments have been considered and found to lack merit. McCarthy, J.P, Garry, Egan Jr., Lynch and Clark, JJ., concur. Ordered that the order and judgment is affirmed, without costs. Grimaldi's application to be added as a petitioner was denied by Supreme Court as untimely.