

Breakaway try in Fresno County's largest union nullified by state board

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An inadvertent error by a state election official will force a breakaway group in Fresno County's largest union to try again in its effort to decertify.

In August, the 854-member [Fresno County Public Safety Association](#), which represents correctional officers in the Fresno County Jail and Juvenile Justice Center, child support workers, security officers and technicians, won decertification from the [Service Employees International Union](#) by a 319-228 margin.

At least that is what public safety association members thought.

In an election ruling released Monday, a state [Public Employment Relations Board](#) lawyer says ballots for the election landed in the hands of voting members before voting was scheduled to get started under the agreement between the two groups.

The votes were counted Aug. 12. Nine days later, SEIU filed its appeal, citing early delivery of voting packets as one of several violations.

We believe those four days were critical and potentially altered the outcome of the election.

Laura Basua, SEIU chapter president for Fresno County

An investigation found that the election supervisor from [State Mediation Conciliation Service](#) took the sealed voter packets to the post office on the night of July 16, "inadvertently forgetting that they were to be held for mailing until July 20," according to the state ruling.

The early mailing was termed an "honest error" by the employment relations board.

The state ruling says the extended voting period "created an unknown impact upon the results of the election."

SEIU told the employment board that it had structured its get-out-the-vote effort around the July 20 date marking when the ballots were supposed to be mailed to members.

"We believe those four days were critical and potentially altered the outcome of the election," said Laura Basua, SEIU chapter president in Fresno County. "We lost four days' worth of conversations with our members to explain the importance of staying united and what was truly at stake."

It was the third time in four years the Fresno County Public Safety Association has tried to separate from the larger union. The last time, in late 2013, the breakaway group lost by 44 votes.

It said to mail on a Monday morning, not a Thursday night. It's just a weird situation.

Eulalio Gomez, president of the Fresno County Public Safety Association

Eulalio Gomez, the association's president, said he was disappointed by the ruling, but said his group will not appeal the decision. "That would delay the election even longer and we want to do it as soon as possible," he said. He expects an election can be scheduled before the end of the year.

The group is trying to leave SEIU, Gomez said, because members of his association are growing increasingly concerned about SEIU's funding of social justice programs, which he said strays from the mission of worker representation.

Including members of the public safety group, SEIU represents about 4,500 county employees.

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