

Recall leaders claim efforts sabotaged

Say Lawrence city clerk deliberately made mistakes

By JILL HARMACINSKI
jharmacinski@eagletribune.com

LAWRENCE — The all-volunteer group that tried to oust Mayor William Lantigua from office believes its recall efforts were sabotaged at City Hall and valid resident signatures they collected were unfairly rejected by Lantigua-controlled workers last week.

Armed with three attorneys, It's Your Right is now investigating "every available legal option" and yesterday renewed its quest to remove Lantigua from office, hopefully by Christmas.

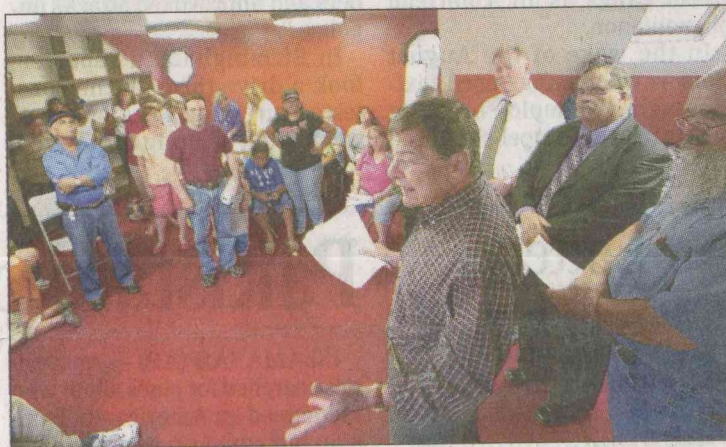
"He is not out. We are therefore committed to staying together until he is out," said organizer

■ Councilor Grisel Silva says FBI has interviewed her about Mayor William Lantigua. Page 7.

Wayne Hayes during press conference yesterday afternoon. The group plans to meet in the next week to firm up efforts to restart another recall effort, he said.

Lantigua, the city's first Latino mayor, sang and basked in triumph Friday evening as It's Your Right came up 866 signatures short of the 5,232 needed to recall him as mayor. The city's Board of Registrars said that only 4,366 of the 5,483 signatures collected by

Please see **RECALL**, Page 7



JAN LEE SEEGER/Staff photo

Recall leaders and city residents gather at Anthony DiFruscia's law office in Lawrence yesterday as he, center, addresses the room with an update on the recall effort.

RECALL: Leaders say Lantigua administration to blame

■ Continued from Page 1

It's Your Right volunteers were verified as registered city voters.

However, this weekend, after a review of recall documents, attorneys working with It's Your Right said that City Clerk William Maloney never signed and dated the recall petitions at the start of the recall process, which is required by the city charter.

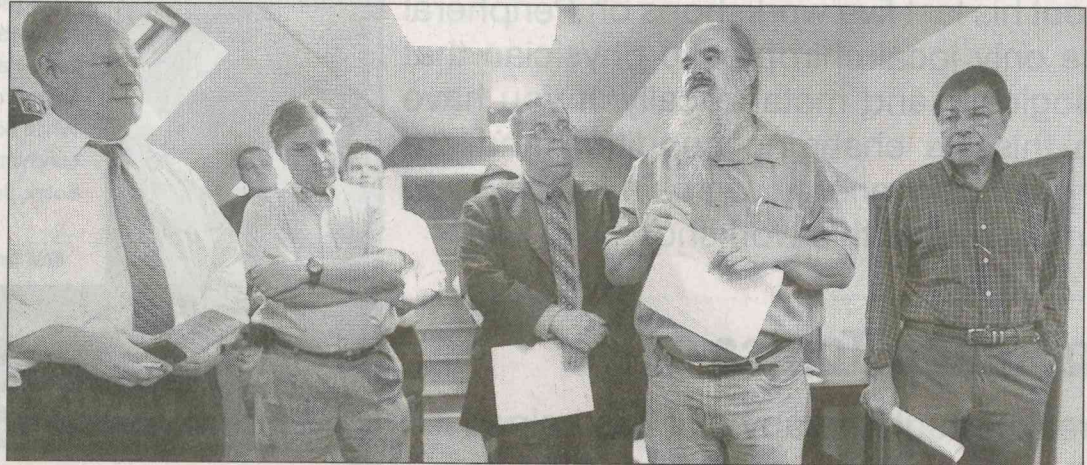
"That provision mandates that the City Clerk is required to date and sign the recall petitions at the time they are made available to the organizers. The City Clerk failed to do so," the group said in press release.

And, they said, Lantigua was aware Maloney did not sign the petitions as required by charter because he referred to this in a letter he wrote to the Board of Registrars on Aug. 9 - three days before that board publicly issued the recall results.

Neither Lantigua nor Maloney could be reached for comment last night.

Maloney's omission, a "fatal flaw" to the recall process, gave Lantigua supporters "perfect grounds for appeal" had the recall effort succeeded, said Robert Okoniewski, an attorney and Lawrence resident working to recall Lantigua. When asked if he believed this omission was deliberate, Okoniewski said "it appears that way."

"I wouldn't put it past (Maloney) to purposefully not sign and date those petitions," Okoniewski said. "This was a process from the get-go that Willy and his people controlled,



JAN LEE SEEGER/Staff photo

City residents gather at Anthony DiFruscia's law office in Lawrence Sunday as Wayne Hayes, center, addresses the room with an update on the recall effort. He is flanked by attorney Jack Wilson, left, city councilor Marc Laplante, next to Wilson, recall leader Rev. Edwin Rodriguez, third from left, and DiFruscia, right.

from the clerk's office to the elections department to the Board of Registrars ... I have no confidence in what people did at City Hall."

"The recall effort failed because the criminality, thuggery and chicanery of the Lantigua administration," Okoniewski added. "Nothing happens in this city but for a reason ... Lantigua was worried about a groundswell of support against him."

It's Your Right also says they collected enough signatures to support the recall process. Many residents, including City Councilor Marc Laplante, said their signatures were wrongly rejected. Rafael Tejada, the city's bilingual elections coordinator, said Laplante was omitted because he listed the

wrong address, however.

City attorney Anthony DiFruscia, who along with Lawrence native and fellow attorney Jack Wilson, said they are aware some recall supporters have been threatened. During yesterday's press conference, DiFruscia said all criminal activity should be reported to police.

"It's not over, until it's over," said DiFruscia, as he spoke to It's Your Right volunteers. "This has to be a new beginning ... Maybe we will have a pleasant Christmas."

Hayes said that recall volunteers encountered many residents who wanted to sign their name and support the effort but feared doing so because they would lose a city job and get knocked out of elderly

housing, he said.

"Why should a city worker be afraid to talk to me for fear of losing their job," Hayes said.

Lantigua is the fourth mayor in the last 20 years to face a potential recall. Only his predecessor Michael Sullivan avoided such a challenge. It's Your Right spent the past month asking voters to sign their petitions, saying Lantigua has been derelict in his duties, insulting toward police and firefighters and is the subject of a federal criminal investigation focused on allegations of corruption.

Friday evening, Lantigua accused It's Your Right members of copying voter rolls onto the petitions and using coercion to get people to sign.