

Court records tie Charles County school board candidate to multiple arrests

BY [KHUSHBOO RATHORE \(HTTPS://CNSMARYLAND.ORG/AUTHOR/KHUSHBOO-RATHORE/\)](https://cnsmaryland.org/author/khushboo-rathore/) - 2  DAYS AGO 3.5K

Voters in Charles County are coming to know her as Julie Brown, the 57-year-old grandmother of two who says she's running for the Board of Education in District 2 as "an advocate for parental rights."

But to the Charles County Sheriff's Office, the woman who lives at the address in Indian Head that Brown listed with the Board of Elections is Julie Lee Higgs. Police say Higgs gave her mother's name – Patricia Lee Brown – instead of her own during a 2016 traffic stop in hopes of avoiding prosecution.

Meanwhile, La Plata Police officers know Julie Lee Melton Higgs, who shares an address and birthday with Brown and who was accused of shoplifting a pair of baby shoes from a Target in 2019 and hundreds of dollars worth of items both before and after that.

That's what Capital News Service discovered when it did a court record search for Julie Brown.

CNS reporters did routine background checks on all 155 school board candidates in Maryland, and when an online records search turned up cases of interest – as it did with Brown – CNS personnel traveled to county courthouses to obtain the full court records.

Court papers showed several candidates had protective orders against them, which were withdrawn by the persons who filed the complaint. Eleven candidates – in addition to a Julie Lee Melton –

had liens filed against them for unpaid taxes. One Eastern Shore candidate was charged years ago with crabbing without a license.

But no candidate's court records raised the sort of questions that stemmed from the CNS research into Brown, one of four candidates running for the District 2 seat and the top vote-getter in the July primary.

READ MORE:

Twelve Maryland school board candidates have faced tax liens (<https://cnsmaryland.org/2022/11/03/eleven-maryland-school-board-candidates-have-faced-tax-liens/>).

An online case search for the name “Julie Brown” produced a divorce record for a Julie Higgs — which reads: “The defendant is to be restored to her former name, Julie Lee Brown.”

A subsequent search for “Julie Higgs” produced several traffic and criminal charges in recent years under the names Julie Lee Higgs, Julie Lee Melton Higgs or Julie Higgs, all living at the same address in Indian Head as Brown. The property at that address is a modest two-bedroom, one-story house on a cul-de-sac that, according to Redfin, has 1,050 square feet of space.

Several of the court records obtained at the Charles County Courthouse showed the people with those names, who live at Brown's address, all had a birthday of May 2, 1965 – which, Brown said in a CNS survey, is her birthday. In addition, four separate police reports obtained from the La Plata Police Department accuse Julie Lee Melton Higgs of shoplifting, and list her birthday as May 2, 1965.

Asked in a telephone interview and via email if she and Julie Lee Higgs, Julie Lee Melton Higgs and Julie Higgs were in fact the same person, Julie Brown never provided a direct answer.

Instead, via text message, she wrote: “I have run a clean and honest, straightforward campaign, have stayed in my lane, concentrating on my views and have never said a negative word about another candidate. I chose to put myself out there to try to do good and this is the type of thing I’ve been dealing with.”

On the road

A Charles County Sheriff’s officer stopped Julie Lee Higgs as she was driving down University Drive in Waldorf on June 8, 2016 – but according to court records, she told the officer that her name was Patricia Lee Brown. She later pleaded guilty to driving with a suspended license, although as part of the plea agreement, the state agreed not to press the identity fraud charge that the arresting officer suggested.

That traffic stop capped nearly three years of trouble on the road for Higgs.

The trouble appears to start when Julie Lee Melton Higgs, who lives at Brown’s address and shares her birthday, was fined \$157.50 for a traffic violation in December 2013.

Her license was suspended on May 12, 2014, when she failed to appear for her initial court date. Court records indicate that she skipped out on her second court appearance, too.

She finally appeared in court on July 24, 2014, where she pleaded guilty and was fined.

READ MORE:**Board of Education Voter Guide**

(<https://cnsmaryland.org/board-of-education-maryland/>)

Higgs failed to pay the fine, court records show. It was Aug. 8, 2014, and her license was suspended again.

Twenty-three months later, Charles County Sheriff's Officer Samuel Hooper noticed a gold 2003 Honda with an expired registration on University Drive in Waldorf. He conducted a traffic stop and asked for a name and license.

The woman, who identified herself as Patricia Lee Brown, didn't have a license with her, so she received three traffic citations: one for driving with expired plates, one for driving without a license and one for failure to display a license on demand.

In addition to calling herself Patricia Lee Brown, the driver said her birthday was Aug. 9, 1941. But the driver wasn't Patricia Lee Brown.

"I was contacted by the real Patricia Lee Brown who advised she wasn't driving the vehicle but her daughter, Julie Lee Higgs, was driving the vehicle," Hooper wrote in a filing with the Charles County District Court.

Hooper also said he confirmed a visual match between the driver and Higgs' license photo.

When confronted by the officer, Higgs said she knew her license was suspended and decided to give a different name, according to court documents.

“The defendant assumed the identity of Patricia Lee Brown to avoid the prosecution for driving on a suspended license,” the officer wrote.

Accused of theft

Two months to the day after that traffic stop, Julie Lee Melton Higgs was charged with misdemeanor theft.

La Plata Police Department reports and Charles County Court records indicate this was the first of five incidents in five years in which authorities accused her of shoplifting.

A La Plata Police Department report from that day indicates that Higgs walked out of a store without paying for \$374.58 of groceries and household items. Charles County Court records show that on March 30, 2017, Melton Higgs entered what’s called an Alford plea on that theft charge. In an Alford plea, the defendant does not admit guilt but acknowledges that the state has evidence that would likely lead to a guilty verdict.

In June of that year, a judge sentenced her in both her suspended license case and her theft case. In the theft case, she was sentenced to 15 days of incarceration, but the judge suspended that sentence. Meanwhile, in both cases, the judge sentenced Higgs to three years of probation and required her to complete two days of community service by Sept. 1, 2017.

Court records indicate that she didn’t do that. The court record is unclear, though, as to whether she faced any consequences for failing to do so.

READ MORE:

[Board of Education Voter Guide](#)

Less than three months later, on Nov. 28, 2017, La Plata Police issued a criminal citation against Julie Lee Melton Higgs, accusing her of shoplifting. Filings with the court indicate that that incident took place at the Target store at 60 Shining Willow Way. Court records show that Melton Higgs was barred indefinitely from the Target store after that.

The police report from that incident indicates that Julie Lee Melton Higgs attempted to leave with \$375.11 worth of items without paying for them. Court records don't make clear what happened in that case.

Two years later, a La Plata Police report said Julie Lee Melton Higgs went shoplifting twice within three days. On Sept. 23, the police report said she stole \$115.97 worth of clothing. Then, according to a court filing by La Plata Police Sgt. J.H. Posey, Higgs returned to the Target on Sept. 25. Security video showed her carrying a large black handbag and a plastic Target shopping bag.

"Higgs then goes to the baby clothing area and selects a pair of baby shoes," Posey wrote. "Higgs goes to the main store aisle and conceals the baby shoes in the large black bag. Higgs then returns some items from the plastic Target bag at Customer Service and leaves with the baby shoes in the large black bag without rendering payment past all points of sale. The baby shoes are \$16.99."

Higgs was charged with trespassing and theft in that case, which never went to trial. Court documents indicate Higgs had to pay \$16.99 to Target to avoid prosecution.

Julie Lee Melton Higgs was arrested again on Nov. 15, 2020, in connection with another shoplifting incident in which she was accused of stealing between \$100 and \$200 worth of merchandise. The La Plata Police report on that incident does not say where it took place, and Charles County Court records don't include any mention of that case.

Brown's response

Julie Brown, who wrote in a text message that she is the “actual minority” in Charles County and Maryland because of her conservative views, charged in an email and a text message that CNS was attacking her because of her ideas.

Brown won the primary with an argument for more discipline, more parental input and less political interference in schools. She is part of a nationwide parents' rights movement that's concerned about sexually explicit books in school libraries, as well as the teaching of American history in a way that emphasizes the nation's history of racism.

“GET POLITICS OUT OF OUR SCHOOLS!” she wrote in response to a CNS survey.

According to Brown, teachers are leaving the school system because children are allowed to misbehave.

“Our school system, the board, the principles (sic) and vice principals need to get a backbone and start showing kids there will be very real consequences to their choices and they will be held responsible for their behavior,” she wrote in a Sept. 6 Facebook post.

Brown now faces three opponents – Jason I. Henry, Jamila Smith and Brenda L. Thomas – in the general election. The winner will serve a four-year term and receive a stipend of \$4,000 per year, plus \$600 annually for expenses. An online court search of those three candidates yielded no arrest records.

Capital News Service called Brown last week to ask her about the fact that she shares an address and birthdate with people with similar names who have been arrested multiple times.

Early in that phone call, Brown said she does not currently have a job but has various hobbies and had been previously working on a book about being a victim of domestic violence.

Asked if she has also gone by the names Julie Lee Higgs and Julie Lee Melton Higgs, Brown said: “Melton is my daughter’s last name. He and I weren’t married. Higgs is not a name that I go by, so I don’t know what to tell you about that.”

Brown then ended the conversation, saying she did not want to talk if the focus of it wasn’t going to be on school board issues.

“I have been on the receiving end of attacks and accusations and I really am not up for it right now,” she added.

Shortly thereafter, in a text message, Brown said: “Clearly your (sic) looking to report on issues that you have no background of the facts,” she wrote.

Brown also said she was taking a very different approach to the last days of the campaign

“I would not attack anyone’s reputation, unless I thought they were a serious danger to anyone,” she wrote. “That’s exactly how I will finish out this election, with integrity and fairness.”

CNS followed up with an email to Brown asking a series of detailed questions. She was asked if Julie Brown was her maiden name, and if so, why she decided to run under it. She was asked if she would confirm that she has used the names Julie Lee Higgs and Julie Lee Melton in the past. She was asked to explain the connection between her and the court cases under related names.

Brown answered none of those questions. In her email response, she threatened legal action against CNS, just as she had in her earlier text, saying CNS's reporting was "based on information found on a website that is not completely factual."

All of the information in this story is based on police and court records that CNS obtained by filing a request to the La Plata Police Department under the Maryland Public Information Act and by visiting the Charles County Circuit and District courts. All of the information is available to anyone.

But to hear Brown tell it, "And as of right now, I am a candidate, citizen and a voter who is protected and has a right to privacy as any other citizen. I am not an elected official."

"I chose to run for the school board for 1 reason," she said, "to help ensure our youth gets the education they ALL deserve and are entitled to regardless of race, cultural background or financial status"