

'Grow up': Former Republican delegate defends civil-rights-themed mailers in redistricting fight

PAC chairman A.C. Cordoza says campaign warns minority voters about redistricting changes; Sen. Mamie Locke blasts the tactic as 'stupid.'

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Former Del. A.C. Cordoza speaks during a news conference at the state Capitol in Richmond on Tuesday, defending a mailer campaign tied to two PACs he chairs that opposes Virginia's April 21 redistricting referendum. (Photo by Shannon Heckt/Virginia Mercury)

The political storm over a mailer campaign invoking civil rights era imagery in Virginia's [redistricting referendum](#) fight intensified Tuesday as Black conservatives stepped forward to defend the message and oppose the proposed map changes, adding new context to the debate over the mailers that has centered on race and historical symbolism.

At the center of the controversy is former Del. A.C. Cordoza of Hampton Roads, a Republican who served two terms in the House of Delegates and was the sole Black member of the House GOP caucus until he lost his reelection bid last November.

Cordoza revealed Tuesday that he serves as chairman of two political action committees — Democracy and Justice PAC and Justice for Democracy — tied to the mailer campaign criticizing the April 21 referendum. Speaking at a news conference Tuesday at the state Capitol, he defended the strategy and dismissed outrage from Democratic officials and civil rights groups.

“I know there’s some controversy behind (the campaign),” Cordoza said. “My statement is very simple. The people who have controversy with this mailer are the same people talking about fairness while constructing a map that disenfranchises Black voters in favor of Northern Virginia legislators. It’s a shameful act.”

The mailers [circulated over the weekend](#) and featured black-and-white imagery of a civil rights march along with the message: “Our ancestors fought to represent us.” The piece urges voters to oppose the referendum and return their ballots.

Civil rights leaders and Democratic officials quickly condemned the materials as misleading and offensive, saying they misuse imagery associated with the struggle for voting rights.

Cordoza rejected that criticism Tuesday, arguing the mailers highlight what he believes is a modern effort to dilute minority voting power.

“They don’t like what they’re seeing because shameful acts were committed back then and now they’re being brought to light and reflected against them because this is what they are doing,” he said. “If they don’t like what the mailer represents, they should not be doing the actions that the mailer brings up, period.”

“This mailer is the backlash,” Cordoza added. “And they’re having a hard time dealing with it because it reflects upon them and they’re not used to being held accountable,” he said in an apparent reference to state Democrats. “And one of the biggest messages I have for the people in Richmond who are upset about this mailer is, ‘grow up.’ This is what accountability looks like.”

PAC structure behind the campaign

The mailers drew scrutiny after initial reporting revealed that the group listed on the materials — Justice for Democracy — had almost no public footprint.

State records showed that a separate political organization, Democracy and Justice PAC, had been created March 3 and shared the same Williamsburg address as a [political compliance firm](#) run by attorney Christopher Woodfin.

Woodfin serves as treasurer for both PACs. On Monday [he declined](#) to discuss the organizations or identify their leadership, citing attorney-client privilege.

Later that day, however, Woodfin shared a statement identifying Cordoza as chairman of both [Democracy and Justice PAC](#) and Justice for Democracy.

Cordoza confirmed that role again on Tuesday, emphasizing that he has been working with both PACs “from the very beginning.” He said the groups would disclose their activities “in compliance as required by state law.”

He also acknowledged the campaign’s strategy would draw criticism.

“Obviously when you touch the third rail like this, you’re going to make some people uncomfortable,” he said.

The mailer campaign was, in part, “targeted to minority voters” whom he believes could lose political influence if the referendum succeeds, Cordoza said.

“It’s letting them know that their vote is specifically being disenfranchised through the 3rd and the 4th Districts’ new maps.”

Video campaign expands criticism

Cordoza appeared Tuesday alongside Waverly Washington, a Black Republican seeking the GOP nomination in Virginia’s 7th Congressional District.

Washington is featured in [a video advertisement](#) circulating online over the past week that shows several Black voters seated in armchairs in a staged living room setting, speaking directly to the camera in quick cuts.

In the roughly minute-long video, participants urge viewers to oppose the referendum and frame it as a threat to representation while referencing the civil rights era — including racial discrimination such as being told to sit at the back of the bus or to remain silent.

The video ends with on-screen text urging voters to “Vote No on April 21.”

Washington said he participated in the effort — which he said is unrelated to Cordoza’s PACs — because he believes the referendum is fundamentally about political power.

“To try to pretend as if this isn’t about power, I think that’s disingenuous,” he said in a phone interview Tuesday morning. “In reality, disenfranchisement is disenfranchisement, whether it’s 1960 or 2026.”

Washington, who faces at least six opponents in the Republican primary, is seeking his party’s nomination to challenge U.S. Rep. Eugene Vindman, D-Woodbridge.

The district is currently competitive, and critics of the referendum say the proposed changes could make it more difficult for a Republican candidate to win.



Waverly Washington, a Republican candidate for Virginia's 7th Congressional District, speaks during a news conference at the state Capitol in Richmond on Tuesday. (Photo by Shannon Heckt/Virginia Mercury)

Washington argued that Virginia voters had already settled the issue of congressional redistricting through a constitutional amendment approved in 2020.

"We're the only state that's already approved our lines in a congressional amendment," he said. "Almost 70% of Virginians already voted for this topic."

He said the video campaign was intended to raise awareness among voters who may not know about the referendum.

"Most people are just unaware of it," Washington said. "Most people are living their lives trying to handle their day-to-day things."

Virginia Democrats, he added, “try to speak as if they own the civil rights movement, which I don’t think is fair to begin with. But the parallels are there because the truth is there.”

Another participant in the video, Fredericksburg conservative activist Jackee Andrews, said the ad came together quickly.

“We just came together as citizens,” said Andrews, a grassroots organizer and donor to former Lt. Gov. Winsome Earle-Sears’ failed gubernatorial bid last year, according to the Virginia Public Access Project.

“We’re very concerned about it, and we just filmed, on a Sunday afternoon, an ad and took it on the internet.”

She said many voters welcomed hearing an opposing view.

“Most people give a thumbs up when they saw our ad,” Andrews said. “They’re happy to see at least somebody’s saying something about it.”

Democrats push back

Democratic leaders sharply criticized the mailer campaign and the broader effort Tuesday during a virtual news conference.

Sen. Mamie Locke of Hampton, the Senate Democratic caucus chair, said the messaging misused painful historical experiences.

“As somebody who grew up under voter suppression and had to actually register under voter suppression ... I know what it’s like,” Locke said.

“For people to now come along and use those same tactics is not only disingenuous, not just misguided, but stupid. If they think that people like me will go along with that kind of stupidity and take it, they’re insane.”

House Speaker Don Scott, D-Portsmouth, also condemned the campaign.

“These folks trying to use this type of language to trick Black people is not only shameful and embarrassing for our state, but it’s also very harmful to folks who’ve been impacted by the loss of the franchise of voting,” Scott said.

Scott questioned the shifting explanations surrounding the PAC behind the mailers.

“I can’t prove it, but you can look at the facts, and kind of map it out,” he said.

“This is a dumpster fire, a rolling bus on fire.”

Another group opposing the referendum, the bipartisan [No Gerrymandering Virginia](#), moved quickly to distance itself from the mailer campaign.

Mike Wade, the organization’s political director, said a reporting error had mistakenly linked one of its donors to the PAC associated with the mailers.

“Once we learned our former treasurer had erroneously reported that one of our donors contributed to an unrelated organization and used his business address from our filings, he was promptly terminated,” Wade said, referring to Woodfin, the Williamsburg attorney.

“Our generous donor William Fralin did not and would not fund — nor would we ever support or associate with — a racially insensitive, misleading mailer targeting minority voters.”

Congressional Democrats condemn campaign

All six Democratic members of Virginia’s congressional delegation also denounced the campaign Tuesday.

“We strongly condemn the deceptive and offensive mailers being sent to Black voters across Virginia by a MAGA-aligned group opposing the April 21

referendum,” U.S. Reps. Bobby Scott, Don Beyer, Jennifer McClellan, Suhas Subramanyam, Eugene Vindman and James Walkinshaw said in a joint statement.

“These mailers misuse imagery from the Civil Rights Movement and even invoke Jim Crow — weaponizing one of the darkest chapters in our nation’s history in an attempt to scare voters and manipulate the outcome of this election.”

The referendum would allow Virginia lawmakers to adjust the state’s congressional map ahead of the 2026 midterm elections.

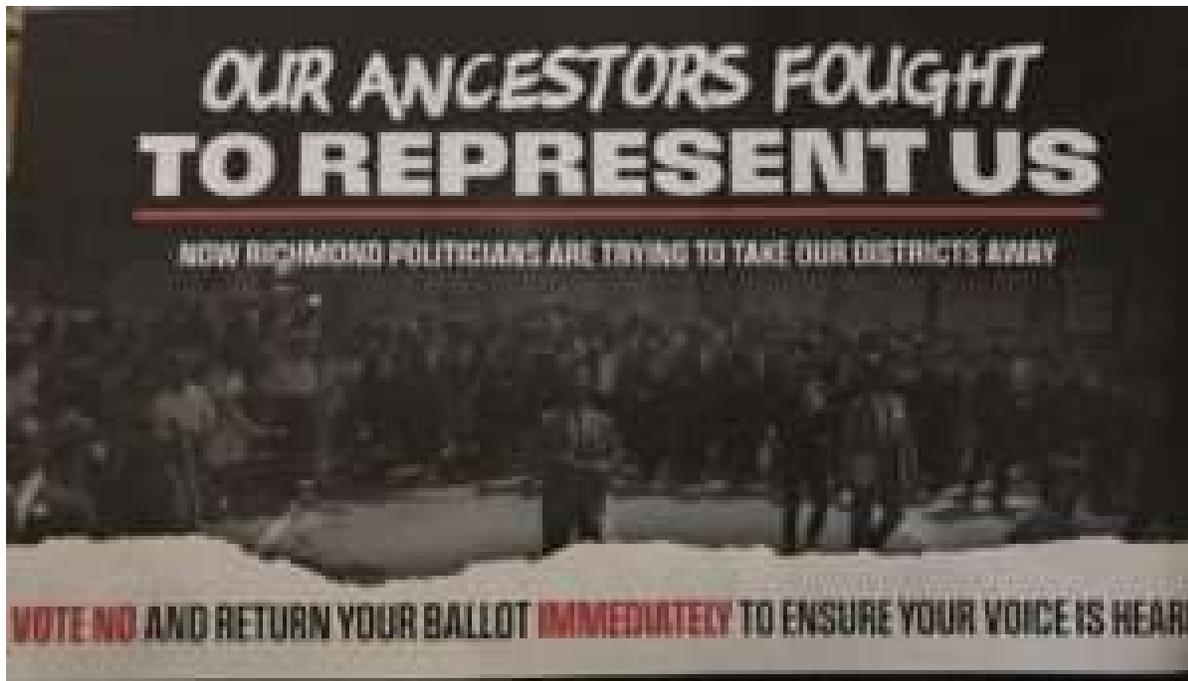
Supporters say the move is a defensive response to aggressive redistricting efforts in other states that could reshape the balance of power in Congress.

Scott contrasted Virginia’s approach with other states where lawmakers redrew congressional maps without voter approval.

“In Texas, North Carolina, Missouri, the legislatures did it with no accountability from the voters,” he said. “In Virginia, the voters will have the final say.”

Virginia Mercury reporter Shannon Heckt contributed to this story.

Editor’s note: A previous version of this story stated that Jackee Andrews worked for Turning Point USA, [based on publicly available information](#) by the Virginia Public Access Project. Andrews notified The Mercury on Tuesday that she is currently not employed by Turning Point USA.



A political mailer opposing Virginia's April 21 redistricting referendum uses imagery from the civil rights era, including a historic march, alongside the message "Our ancestors fought to represent us." Civil rights groups and state officials have criticized the mailer campaign as misleading and inappropriate. (Courtesy of Matt Royer)