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U.S. Attorney: Message to Camden voters wasn't ours

Taped phone messages warning Camden voters against taking payment for their votes in last week's local election and urging them to report any such offers to the U.S. Attorney's Office did not come from federal prosecutors.

The messages, left on May 8, the day of the City Council election, did not claim to be authorized by the U.S. Attorney's Office, but a story in Sunday's Inquirer erroneously attributed the messages to prosecutors.

"Voters alert!" the message said. "Please note that it is a federal crime to be paid for a vote. I repeat, it is a crime. If you or your neighbor have been offered payment, please report it immediately to the U.S. Attorney's Office at 856-757-5026."

In a statement yesterday, U.S. Attorney Christopher Christie said his office "would never engage in such a practice, which clearly could have been used as a voter-suppression tactic." The Inquirer did not contact the U.S. Attorney's Office to authenticate or comment on the phone messages before printing its seven-paragraph story.

Christie said the U.S. Department of Justice also had nothing to do with the phone messages.

It was unclear how many Camden voters received the message or where it originated.

The U.S. Attorney's Office said no federal laws were broken by the leaving of the messages.

"It would appear that someone was trying to be, shall we say, persuasive by dropping the U.S. Attorney's Office into it," said Michael Drewniak, a spokesman for Christie. "It was a very dubious and misleading effort on someone's part."

Fewer than 4,000 people - or 8.4 percent of registered voters - turned out in the election, which was won by four Democratic Party-backed Council incumbents.

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