

Petitioning banned from post office

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WINSTED — The sidewalk in front of the post office recently became off-limits to petitioners when the postmaster told a resident she could not circulate a petition there.

Judy Pavlak was told in late March that she could not stand in front of the Main Street building while seeking signatures on a petition. The petition requested state officials restore grant funding to the school system.

Pavlak said she was surprised when Postmaster James St. Pierre told her she could not petition there. She said that for as long as she could remember, residents had sought petition signatures on the sidewalk in front of the post office, which she said is a prime spot to find residents on a Saturday morning.

Pavlak complied with St. Pierre's request, but she later filed a complaint with the post office. She said the supervisor at the time did not want to handle the complaint, and St. Pierre was on vacation, so nothing was done immediately.

Forbidding residents from peti-

tioning outside casts a chill over the rights of local citizens, she said, adding that some members of the Winchester Taxpayers Association, who have spent countless hours in front of the post office with petitions, were upset when they heard what happened.

People have been told they cannot petition at either Ames Plaza or Edwards supermarket, Pavlak said. If the post office is off-limits too, she said, townspeople would lose a valuable area for petitioning.

"So, there's very few areas left where democracy can work, and the post office has always been the main area," she said.

Pavlak also contacted community lawyer Charlene LaVoie, who researched the issue. Clearly, townspeople have the right to circulate petitions on the sidewalk, LaVoie said.

On April 7, LaVoie wrote a letter to St. Pierre, protesting his action.

The sidewalk in front of the post office is a public passageway that is visibly indistinguishable from any other municipal sidewalk.

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