

Kaohsiung trying to obstruct recall vote: lawmakers

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Legislators from the pan-green camp in Taipei yesterday hold signs urging Kaohsiung residents to take part in a June 6 vote on a proposal to recall Kaohsiung Mayor Han Kuo-yu.

Photo: Liu Hsin-de, Taipei Times

Lawmakers from the pan-green camp yesterday accused the Kaohsiung City Government of trying to obstruct efforts to set up polling stations for a vote to recall Kaohsiung Mayor Han Kuo-yu (韓國瑜) as well as related promotional campaigns.

The Central Election Commission (CEC) on April 17 announced that the recall vote would take place on June 6.

As of Monday, the Kaohsiung City Election Commission, the CEC's branch in the city, had secured only 1,313 locations for polling stations, leaving it 510 polling booths short of its planned total.

Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Legislator Liu Shih-fang (劉世芳) told a news conference that efforts by Han and his team to prevent the recall vote hinders people's ability to exercise their constitutional right.

All schools should lend the branch space for only two polling stations, the Kaohsiung Education Bureau has said, citing COVID-19 prevention efforts.

The Kaohsiung Civil Affairs Bureau has notified district offices that space allotted for polling stations should give priority to governmental organizations, Liu said.

Liu accused the Kaohsiung City Government of selectively enforcing laws, adding that promotional materials for the recall campaign were quickly taken down, while billboards praising Han remained in place.

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The Kaohsiung Transportation Bureau has allegedly been pressuring advertising companies not to place advertisements for the recall campaign on public buses, while advertisements praising Han for being a mayor with integrity are still in place, Liu added.

The Kaohsiung Police Department's notice that recall campaign events involving more than three people can only be held after obtaining the department's approval was a regression of democracy and something that could only occur during the Martial Law era, she added.

DPP Legislator Lee Kun-tse (李坤澤) said all Kaohsiung residents have the right to vote on June 6 and called on Han not to suppress the basic rights of voters, adding that further oppression would only lead to a greater reprisal from city residents.

DPP Legislator Chao Tien-lin (趙天麟) said that the CEC branch has been unable to find venues to establish polling stations in Fongshan (鳳山), Lingya (苓雅) and Sanmin (三民) districts — represented by himself, DPP Legislator Hsu Chih-chieh (許智傑) and Lee respectively.

“It is simply intolerable,” Chao said, urging Kaohsiung residents to cast their ballots on June 6.

New Power Party (NPP) Legislator Chiu Hsien-chih (邱顯智) called on the CEC and the National Police Administration to contest the Kaohsiung Police Department's notice, saying that it infringes on people's right to recall elected officials and undoes the efforts of those who fought to give power back to the people.

Taiwan People's Party (TPP) caucus whip Lai Hsiang-ling (賴香菱) did not attend the news conference, despite having been invited, saying that the party has its own stance regarding the issue.

The TPP believes that Han should not circumvent the Kaohsiung City Council's scrutiny, nor should the Kaohsiung City Government seek to obstruct the vote with its administrative power, Lai said.

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However, the TPP is concerned the DPP's and the CEC's statements raise suspicions of manipulation or an outright violation of administrative neutrality, Lai said, urging the pan-green and pan-blue camps to exercise prudence to avoid undermining administrative neutrality.

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