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City Hall aide doing grunt work for anti-McCann suit

By **KEN THORBOURNE**
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

Adding juice to the theory that Jersey City Mayor Jerramiah Healy is behind a court challenge to former Jersey City mayor Gerald McCann's election to the school board, a City Hall aide spent yesterday at the Board of Elections copying absentee ballot certificates on behalf of the plaintiff against McCann.

Ivan Freire — a \$27,000-a-year research aide hired by the city last June — was at the board representing Jenny Garcia, who lost to McCann by 21 votes on April 17 for the third open seat on the board.

Represented by a firm with close ties to Healy and the Hudson County Democratic Organization, Garcia is challenging the election on the grounds

McCann illegally “coerced ... incompetent or otherwise elderly and ill” residents at the nursing home to vote for him using absentee ballots.

Asked by a reporter what he was doing, Freire said, “I’m just helping out.” Freire refused to identify who he was “helping out.” He added he wasn’t getting paid and had taken the day off from work.

City Hall spokesman Stan H. Eason said the firm representing Garcia — Schwartz, Simon, Edelstein, Celso and Kessler of Florham Park — “reached out to City Hall officials and asked if there was anyone available.”

It was mere coincidence Freire’s assignment pertained to the Garcia/McCann matter since the law firm has often called City Hall looking for help, according to Eason.

McCann has said he is con-

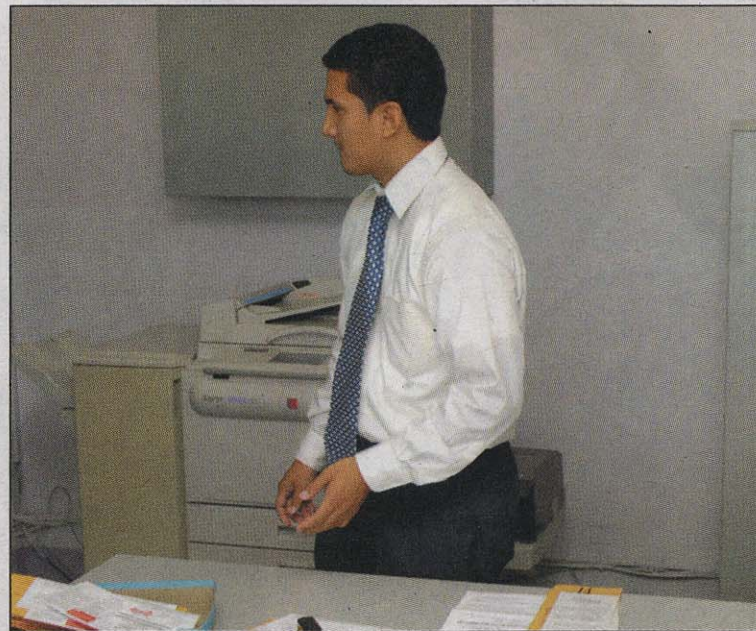
vinced Healy has a “political vendetta” against him because Healy blames him for naked pictures of the mayor sitting on his stoop that surfaced during the 2005 mayoral contest.

“He blames me for something I had nothing do with,” said McCann, who was also at the Board of Elections. “At least now the judge and everyone knows this is a political battle.”

Garcia didn’t return phone calls to comment. Garcia has said Stephen Edelstein, a principal in the firm, called her and offered his services for free. Neither Edelstein, nor Healy, returned phone calls seeking comment.

The court case resumes May 22, at 1:30 p.m., before Assignment Judge Maurice Gallipoli.

KEN THORBOURNE can be reached at kthorbou@jjournal.com.



JOURNAL PHOTO

JERSEY CITY City Hall employee Ivan Freire works at the Board of Elections yesterday counting the school board election absentee ballots.