

Blount ordered off Sept. primary ballot

Judge agrees senator
doesn't live in district
that he represents

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Senate Majority Leader Clarence W. Blount, whose nearly 28 years as a state lawmaker earned him a reputation as the conscience of the Maryland Senate, was ordered off next month's Democratic primary ballot last night for not living in the Baltimore district he represents.

Anne Arundel County Circuit Judge Michael Loney delayed his order until Tuesday at 5 p.m. or, if appealed, until the state Court of Appeals acts. Blount's lawyers said they will file an immediate appeal.

The decision was prompted by a lawsuit by Blount's opponent in the primary, state Del. Frank D. Boston Jr., who had hired private investigators to tail Blount. They found that the senator lived in Pikesville and not in

the 41st District. Blount later acknowledged in court that he slept most nights at his Pikesville condominium.

Loney said Blount had served with "honor and distinction" but was "not eligible to stand for election." In ordering Blount's name stricken from the ballot and new ones printed in their place, Loney said: [See Blount, 13A]



SUN FILE PHOTO

Plans appeal: Senate Majority Leader Clarence W. Blount's lawyers say they will appeal the ruling.

"To permit otherwise would distort the integrity of the electoral process."

Interviewed on the steps of the Annapolis courthouse, Blount said: "I'm not crying and I'm not dying. I feel sorry more for the quality of representation and the choice that people have now on the ballot."

Blount, 77, also reiterated his belief that he meets the legal qualifications for residency by renting an apartment on Copley Road in Baltimore for \$375 a month. "One doesn't spend money on a facility that you think is not your domicile." Boston had argued that the home was just a mail drop.

Boston, who was in the courtroom when Loney read his decision, embraced his attorney. Later, he said: "I think justice has been done. I think this is a clear victory for the people who live in and love the 41st legislative district."

Boston, a member of the House of Delegates since 1987, is a Baltimore native and is chairman of the city's House delegation. He has been a member of the House Economic Matters Committee since 1995. He is 59.

The case turned on an interpretation of the state law governing residency.

Although lawmakers can own multiple properties, state law requires that they have one legal residence. Past court cases have concluded that an official residence is the place where legislators sleep and is used as a voting address.

While Blount claimed his home at 3410 Copley Road as his legal residence, he said he sleeps there just two to three nights a month. Most nights he and his wife stay at the Pikesville condominium they bought for retirement three years ago.

It is unlikely that the judge's order will affect Blount's current status as a senator, said Assistant

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Attorney General Robert A. Zarnoch. That's because the Senate would have to decide whether to take action against Blount while they are in session, and they won't reconvene until January — the end of Blount's term.

Blount had planned to retire at the end of his term, but supporters, friends and constituents urged him to reconsider in June.

The absence of Blount, should it ultimately come to that, will dramatically affect Baltimore.

Over the next four years, the General Assembly will redraw legislative districts after the 2000 census and the appointment of legislative committee chairs —

both of which Blount would have had significant influence in deciding.

Yesterday's decision may mean the end of a career of a man who rose from working the fields of an old tobacco plantation in Beaufort County, N.C., to become one of the most influential lawmakers in Maryland.

Ray Feldmann, a spokesman for Gov. Parris N. Glendening, said the governor was unavailable for comment last night. Glendening was scheduled to attend a campaign rally for Blount tonight in West Baltimore.

"For a statesman such as he, who has done so much for this city

and the state, to have him his family disgraced in this manner is despicable," said Sen. Nathaniel J. McFadden, chairman of the city's Senate delegation before the ruling. "You just wouldn't think that someone would stoop to filming his wife and his refrigerator."

The Senate's majority leader since 1983, Blount is Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller's right-hand man. Blount, known by his colleagues as "the conscience of the Maryland Senate," is also Baltimore's senior senator.

In 1987, Miller named Blount, his close friend, chairman of the Economic and Environmental Affairs Committee, making him the

first black legislator to chair a standing committee of the Maryland Senate. Blount has held the post since that time.

Miller could not be reached for comment.

House Speaker Casper R. Taylor Jr., a Democrat from Allegany County, said last night that Blount was a "bridge builder," who worked to bring city legislators together with those from around the state to resolve conflicts.

"I deeply regret that Senator Blount's career has to end on this kind of note because he's had an outstanding career and he has immense respect among his colleagues," said Taylor. Taylor said that Blount's long record of service may have been why admirers in the 41st District persuaded him to put his name on the ballot one more time.

"I think he was overly per-

sueded to run, against his own intuition," Taylor said.

One of Blount's most powerful moments came during the General Assembly's 1997 session, when he rose from his seat on the floor of the Senate and gave one the more impassioned speeches of the year.

Just before a critical vote on a bill that would infuse \$254 million into Baltimore's school system, Blount gave his speech, telling his colleagues why he was supporting the package. His speech won the needed support for the bill.

"They're getting less and less and less," Blount said of the city schools. "Poorer teachers, poorer facilities, less equipment, no computers, nothing.

"I'm not going to stand here and allow that to happen if I can," he said.

Sun staff writers William F. Zorzi and Dennis O'Brien contributed to this article.