

Letter to the Editor:

Title: An Open Letter to the DOE Dept of Fiscal Accountability & Compliance

As a Clifton resident and taxpayer, I am urging the Department of Education's Office of Fiscal Accountability & Compliance to come clean with the taxpayers of Clifton and release the Department's true Audit Report (OFAC Case #1418) on 290 Brighton Road not the whitewashed draft version released to the public by the Clifton Board of Education.

How do the residents and taxpayers of Clifton know this is a whitewashed version? The school board attorney at the Feb 11, 2009 BOE meeting himself stated that the Office of Fiscal Accountability originally had 30 findings against the school board including the finding that BOE Commissioner Norman Tahan stored his boat on BOE owned property. The board attorney also admitted under questioning by BOE Commissioner Michael Paitchell that he had received a draft report from the Department of Fiscal Accountability back in Dec 2008 well before the exit interview conducted on January 23, 2009. The BOE attorney stated that the OFAC sent him his draft so that "he could correct their mistakes". The BOE attorney also stated that he did not share this copy of the report with the BOE, despite the fact that the BOE is his client and is paying his fees. The BOE attorney also stated that he was aware that the report went to the Attorney General's office. (I understand and would like the BOE attorney to confirm that in fact he worked for the Attorney General's Office prior to going into private practice).

Additionally, the draft version released by the BOE was written by Karl Feltes (as evidenced by the notation on the bottom "I:\k.feltes\Clifton\Clifton BOE 2009.doc"). We know that Karl Feltes did not conduct the audit on 290 Brighton Road. It is true that Karl Feltes wrote the initial letter to the BOE informing them of the audit but soon after he wrote this letter Mr. Feltes personally called me to inform me that he would not be the auditor working on the audit but that Kishor Ranade would be the auditor conducting the audit. Additionally, throughout the audit, it was Kishor Ranade who questioned me and several other residents and current BOE Commissioner Michael Paitchell and an ex- BOE commissioner. Also, we know that Mr. Ranade completed the audit before he went on medical leave and in fact delayed his surgery in order to complete the report. Therefore, DOE spokeswoman Kathryn Forsyth's statement that the report wasn't complete before Mr. Ranade went out on medical leave is totally incorrect.

Finally, the Director of the Office of Fiscal Accountability and Compliance, Robert Cicchino, Tom Martin, Kishor Ranade and Karl Feltes himself explained that the department's procedure was that the audit would be completed and the school board would not receive an advance copy of the report. In fact, I was told that the auditor would bring a copy of the report to the exit interview and distribute it to the school administration but would take this copy back at the end of the exit interview. The school board would be sent a final copy of the report after this to which they had 40 days to rebut. Lastly, Mr. Tom Martin specifically told me that the BOE should not have a draft copy of the report, let alone distribute this "draft" copy to the public (the draft copy is posted on the school board's website).

The integrity of the Department of Fiscal Accountability & Compliance has been compromised and leaves the public to question any and all of its findings on this audit as well as any of the other audits it conducts throughout the state.

It should be remembered that The Department of Fiscal Accountability & Compliance is part of the Division of Education and reports directly to DOE Commission Lucy Davy. So we have a subdivision of the DOE policing itself. Keep in mind it was the same Department of Education who approved the construction of 290 Brighton Road in the first place so how could a subdivision of the DOE be an objective auditor? In this case, the Clifton BOE attorney had well over a month to “correct” the OFAC’s findings.

The taxpayers of the state of NJ desire answers and well as the residents and taxpayers of Clifton. I urge Mr. Cicchino to release the true audit report conducted by Kishor Ranade immediately. I call on Governor Corzine to conduct an immediate investigation.

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