

Letter to the Editor: Taxpayer Funds Used to Fund a Personal Allegation

As the readers are aware, the ethics charges against Clifton BOE Commissioner Michael Paitchell were dismissed by the School Ethics Commission. There are some very interesting revelations released in the School Ethics Commission's decision. Things the BOE has once again failed to tell the public. The decision points out that the dismissed ethics charges against Michael Paitchell was nothing more than a "citizen's complaint" or a personal allegation funded with taxpayer money authorized by the BOE.

Look at the facts. In April 2007, Marie Hakim as BOE President filed ethics charges against Michael Paitchell on behalf of the BOE with Commissioners Urciuoli, Gagnon, Traier, Tahan and Renta voting with Ms. Hakim to file these charges. In Dec. 2007, the Ethics Commission informed the BOE that the board as an entity could not join the complaint with Hakim and that the other board members voting to file the charges may individually join the complaint as complainants. Neither Urciuoli, Gagnon, Traier, Tahan or Renta chose to do this (one can only assume that they chose to hid under the skirt tales of Hakim). That is why the case was captioned as Marie Hakim vs. Michael Paitchell.

In April 2008, when Hakim lost her re-election bid for the Clifton BOE, this complaint became just a "citizen's complaint" since Hakim was no longer a member of the Clifton BOE. At this time, the new BOE under the direction of newly elected President Mike Urciuoli voted to continue to pay for Hakim's legal expenses as the "complainant" in this ethics complaint against Paitchell despite the fact that since Hakim was no longer a member of the BOE they would be paying for legal expenses for a "personal allegation" of Hakim against Paitchell. So under President Mike Urciuoli, this BOE authorized the spending of over \$250,000 of taxpayer funds for a personal allegation or a private citizen's complaint. It was the gang of five (Urciuoli, Gagnon, Traier, Tahan and Renta) who chose to waste over \$250,000 of taxpayer money funding a private citizen's ethics complaint against a BOE member. One must wonder if the gang of five did not vote to continue to fund Hakim's legal battle against Paitchell would she as a private citizen have used her own money to continue this ridiculous case. I tend to believe she wouldn't have used her money for this. If not, the case would have ended one year ago and the legal expenses would have been much lower!

This BOE under the direction of President Urciuoli has set an extremely bad precedence by funding a private citizen's ethics complaint as the "complainant" against a BOE member. Any private citizen could start a legal action against a BOE member have the BOE pay the entire cost of the litigation both from the complainant (a private citizen) and respondent (a BOE member). Normally, if a private citizen brings an ethics complaint against a sitting BOE member, the board only pays for the BOE member's legal defense not the legal expenses of the complainant.

As a Clifton taxpayer, I wonder if we could start a taxpayer lawsuit against these BOE members for wasting our money on a personal vendetta. Since Urciuoli and Gagnon are running for re-election, I wonder if they will pledge to refund taxpayers their share of the \$250,000 spent to date. I doubt they will. Yet, they keep trying to tell us it is all about the kids, right? It is time we the voters of Clifton stop this nonsense and vote Urciuoli and Gagnon out!

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