

State forces New Bedford City Councilor to work without pay

The following was submitted to us from Henry Bousquet, Ward 3 City Councilor:

To the People of New Bedford and the Voters of Ward 3,

I am writing to inform you of what I see as a great unfairness.

Since April 17, 2014, I have been performing my duties as a City Councilor without pay while I examined an apparent conflict in state regulations (MGL Ch. 39, Sec.6A.) regarding compensation of public employees as it concerns my career as a public educator and my public service as an elected official of Ward 3.

In March of 2014, I received a call from the state, followed by a letter from the Ethics Commission, which stated in a legally complex manner that I unknowingly had a "conflict of interest." Somehow my career as an educator at Greater New Bedford Voc-Tech was in conflict with my duties as a city councilor. The conflict is not in the work I do, but because of the fact that I receive a salary from both positions and they are from the same municipality. It stated I had 30 days to choose one salary only. Apparently, because of a court ruling the ethics law conflicted in definition in such a way that I and my employers were unaware: based on the phrasing of the law, it seems regional school district employees and its teachers are municipal employees. Despite the fact that no "actual, material conflict exists" I am not allowed to collect the pay I have earned.

As your councilor I spend an average 30 or more hours per week at committee and community meetings, working with constituents to solve problems no matter the day or the hour. I have always worked hard on behalf of the people of New Bedford; it is a promise I made when elected in 2011, and one from which I have never wavered. It includes learning all aspects of those issues brought before the council and how to maintain good government in order to cast the most informed votes that I can, with integrity and fairness.

Fairness is what I seek for myself in this case, and I ask for your help in achieving it.

I have always worked two jobs to make ends meet. My family depends on it. I gave up my second job to serve the people of Ward 3. Like many of my neighbors, I am not wealthy. I live in a two-family in the heart of a working class neighborhood in my ward. I have young children, and my wife and I work hard to make it work. Being a city councilor was never a way to "get rich" but to improve Ward 3 and our city overall.

Please support the initiative to have my salary restored and to collect what is rightfully owed to my wife and children for the hours I spend away from them, working for you. I don't expect all the compensation I have lost in the 12 months of foregone salary. I simply ask for the portion within the current fiscal year.

I am committed to the people of my city and want to continue to serve them, but this is an unfathomable sacrifice for my

family. Help me right this injustice and help me to continue serving you to the best of my ability. Write a letter or send an email to the Standard Times, call WBSM , call your City Councilor, call the Mayor's office and advocate on my behalf so that I can continue to serve you, New Bedford.

Gratefully,

Henry Bousquet CEC – Ward 3 City Councilor

Want to voice your opinion?

Petition

here: http://petitions.moveon.org/sign/restore-ward-3-councilor?source=c.em&r_by=8634735

Contact the State Ethics Commission

State Ethics Commission

One Ashburton Place, Room 619

Boston, MA 02108

Phone (617) 371-9500

Fax (617) 723-5851

Contact details: <http://www.mass.gov/ethics/contact-us.html>