



Office of the Prosecutor County of Burlington News



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Mt. Holly, NJ: As the public is well aware, the primary function of a County Prosecutor’s Office is to investigate criminal allegations and then determine if those allegations rise to the level that they should be formally prosecuted. Likewise the obligation of the County Prosecutor is to assure that justice is served rather than thwarted. I am deeply troubled by a political website posting that was apparently placed by Richard Dennison, a candidate for State Senate in the 7th District in Burlington/Camden County. The posting by the candidate indicates that my office had recently interviewed a campaign volunteer of Mr. Dennison based upon a citizen complaint against the volunteer for stealing and destroying signs of the opposition candidate. The web posting further states that his campaign volunteer, who Mr. Dennison claimed was 17 years of age, was visited by members of my staff at the high school that he attends and then was later interviewed at my office regarding the allegations. The candidate then states that upon learning of this difficulty involving his campaign volunteer, he “rushed” over to my office to “sort everything out with the Prosecutor’s Office.” Finally, Mr. Dennison stated that he was told by a member of my staff that the charges against his campaign volunteer were “absolutely baseless.” While my office does not generally comment on ongoing investigations, in this case I feel compelled to publicly respond to certain statements that Mr. Dennison falsely attributes to my office. At no time was Mr. Dennison ever advised that the allegations against his volunteer were “absolutely baseless.” To the contrary he was advised that the criminal allegations against his volunteer were true. I am thus compelled to set the record straight.

Yesterday, Mr. Dennison’s campaign volunteer was approached by two investigators from my office for the purposes of an interview. The volunteer was approached because he was suspected of damaging or removing campaign signs of the opposition. Contrary to the statement of Mr. Dennison in his web posting, the volunteer is in fact an 18 year old adult. Without going into specific details of the investigation, my office was supplied with the identity of the 18 year old campaign volunteer by Mr. Dennison’s father. The Riverside Police Department had previously been provided with a license plate number which had been supplied by the citizen complainant when she observed the alleged wrongdoing. In fact the vehicle in question was leased by the candidate. When an attempt was made to contact the candidate, instead contact was made with candidate’s father, who advised that the vehicle had been “loaned” to the 18 year old campaign volunteer for the purpose of placing campaign signs throughout the area.

Thereafter, the 18 year old was interviewed. Without revealing specific details of that interview, Mr. Dennison’s claim that the allegations against the 18 year old were “absolutely baseless” is in fact false. In fact, when I was first made aware of today’s website posting by the candidate, internal discussions were already in progress with members of my staff on a charging decision based on an evaluation of the case.

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Even more troubling is the fact that Mr. Dennison has made these public statements in his posting when he had been previously advised by a member of my staff that the evidence against the 18 year old was overwhelming. It is incomprehensible how Mr. Dennison could make representations to the general public, knowing that my office had previously advised him that the allegations against his volunteer were true.

I am extremely troubled by Mr. Dennison's false representations which he attributes to information received from my office.

As I have stated earlier, it is the obligation of this office to investigate and prosecute cases. It is also our obligation to see that justice is done. In my view, this candidate has attempted to politicize the actions of my office in investigating what was a citizen complaint against one of his campaign volunteers. I cannot permit my office to be manipulated in this fashion.

With regard to the pending investigation against the 18 year old volunteer, my office will in due course make the appropriate determination as to whether or not criminal charges should be filed or whether this matter should be remanded to the municipal court for resolution in some other fashion.

Notwithstanding that charging decision, I simply could not permit the misrepresentations of Mr. Dennison to go without a response from my office. To remain silent would be a disservice to the Office of the Prosecutor and to the public.

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