RHODE ISLAND Lawyers Weekly

Ethics panel drops complaint against Silva

By: R.I. Lawyers Weekly Staff January 12, 2022

The state Ethics Commission has dismissed a complaint brought by the Rhode Island Republican Party against Anthony Silva, the former chief of staff to Gov. Daniel J. McKee.

Last August the GOP accused Silva of an ethical lapse by failing to report on mandatory disclosure forms that he had entered into an agreement for the purchase and sale of a wetlands property in Cumberland that he hoped to develop. Silva soon stepped down from his position in McKee's administration amid questions on whether he used his influence to secure needed DEM permitting for the project.

Several news outlets reported that the commission voted 7-0 in executive session that there was not probable cause to believe that Silva violated the state's reporting requirements.

"The commission found that it was not at all clear that the relevant law requires that type of disclosure," the commission's executive director, Jason M. Gramitt, told The Boston Globe. "The financial statement and accompanying instructions don't identify a buyer's interest in a purchase and sale agreement as the type of information that must be disclosed. Given those ambiguities, the commission can't say that any person's omission of an interest in a purchase and sale agreement was intentional."

State Republican Party Chair Sue Cienki told The Globe she thought the case had been clearly laid out.

"If the Ethics Commission felt their statute was ambiguous, they had years to clarify it. Their interpretation of ambiguity really allows politicians to hide their financial interest in property, and I don't think that's good."

A written decision with more details on the vote's rationale is expected soon.

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