

Catholic school board chair removed from office for conflict of interest won't run again

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Toronto Catholic School Board Chair Angela Kennedy says she will not seek re-election this fall after being found guilty of conflict of interest and removed from her seat as trustee.

Kennedy said she was “extremely disappointed” Ontario Superior Court Justice Lois Roberts ruled Thursday that Kennedy breached conflict of interest laws when she voted in May 2008 against staff layoffs that might have affected a son who worked for the board.

While the ruling removed Kennedy from office immediately, Roberts did not bar her from running again this fall, noting the trustee's long service and the fact she seemed to act more out of confusion about conflict laws, rather than a desire for personal gain.

“I take comfort in the fact the judge ruled I was solely there for my constituents,” said Kennedy, a nurse and mother of seven who has been a trustee for 10 years. “I hope the board can move on now and put this behind them and move out of provincial supervision.”

Queen's Park seized the reins of the board in the spring of 2008 after trustees failed to balance the books and a number were caught in an expense account scandal. Kennedy said the frustration of being under supervision led her to decide not to run again even before the ruling came out this week.

Roberts also set a Sept. 13 trial date for Trustee Barbara Poplawski, charged with a conflict of interest for taking part in the same layoff vote at the same 2008 meeting, despite having a daughter who worked for the board.

Kennedy's ouster leaves the 13 schools in her east-end ward without a trustee as a new school year looms. Board spokesperson Mary Jo Deighen said the law requires the board to fill the seat within 90 days, but it is not allowed to call a by-election so close to the municipal vote Oct. 25, so board supervisor Richard Alway either will appoint a trustee in the interim, or invite applications from the public.



Toronto Catholic school Trustee Barbara Poplawski

It is the second time a trustee has been removed for conflict of interest. Former Chair Oliver Carroll was found guilty of conflict and removed last year for voting on the same layoffs at the same meeting, despite having two children who worked for the board.

Trustee Rob Davis, who was tapped to replace Trustee Christine Nunziata when she was removed from office for expense account abuse, says these problems underscore the need for an integrity commissioner.

Parent Kevin Morrison is running for trustee in Kennedy's Ward and said he sees the judge's ruling as marking "a new start for the board. We want to get all this behind us."

Deighen said it is not clear whether the board must also choose a new chair so close to an election. Under provincial supervision, the chair's powers are limited.