



NIAGARA COUNTY
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE

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CONTACT: CHRISTIAN W. PECK
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER
TEL: (716) 439-7241
FAX: (716) 439-7058

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**LEGISLATORS DEMAND TRANSPARENCY FROM BRIDGE COMMISSION
KIMBLE, WOJTASZEK BACK SUIT AGAINST CROSS-BORDER AGENCY**

LOCKPORT—Niagara County legislators increased the pressure on the Niagara Falls Bridge Commission to operate within state and federal laws on open government Tuesday in Lockport when a bipartisan team of lawmakers offered support for a suit against the international agency.

“As representatives of the people of Niagara County, we have a duty to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our colleagues when they are fighting for their constituents’ rights, and for what is right,” wrote Legislators Paul Wojtaszek, R-North Tonawanda, and Renae Kimble, D-Niagara Falls in a joint letter to colleagues urging the entire Legislature support efforts by Legislators John D. Ceretto, R-Lewiston, and Danny Sklarski, D-Niagara, to force the Bridge Commission to open its books for public scrutiny.

Ceretto and Sklarski were forced to sue the Commission in June when Freedom of Information Law requests they submitted were rejected by the Bridge Commission. The Commission has used the novel logic that since it operates in both the United States and Canada, neither nation’s laws on open government actually apply to it—actions that prompted Kimble and Wojtaszek to accuse the agency of “acting lawlessly” in their letter.

Wojtaszek and Kimble urged the stance in a letter to colleagues due to restrictions on the introduction of resolutions during Tuesday night’s organizational meeting of the Legislature. The pair already have made clear they will introduce a formal resolution urging the presiding judge reviewing the lawsuit, Judge Richard J. Arcara of the U.S. District Court for the Western District of New York, to both compel the Bridge Commission to act within the law and to pay for the legal costs incurred by Sklarski and Ceretto, who are paying for court costs out of their own funds in pursuit of justice for their constituents.

“What they’re asking for is for transparency in government,” Kimble explained. “Under the Freedom of Information laws, because the Bridge Commission is a governmental body, we are entitled to information which they have failed to provide, and we want to make sure that we have this information because it belongs out there to the general public.”

Kimble noted that the fact that the Bridge Commission was created by an Act of Congress in 1938 made it “clear that, at a minimum, the federal Freedom of Information Act is applicable.”

Wojtaszek echoed Kimble’s concerns at a press briefing following Tuesday night’s State of the County address.

“All we’re asking is that the Bridge Commission to comply with both state and federal law which requires it to disclose its dealings to the public,” Wojtaszek said.

Wojtaszek added that he and Kimble had decided to ask the court to award legal costs to Ceretto and Sklarski because he didn’t want the pair to be left responsible for paying a lawsuit they filed to protect their constituents’ interests.

"We're seeking attorneys' fees when we win the lawsuit because [Ceretto and Sklarski's] expenses were incurred for having to go about this the hard way instead of the Bridge Commission just following the law that they're required to follow," Wojtaszek said.

Wojtaszek said he was confident of the lawsuit's outcome.

"We feel this is very important. Good government is open government," Wojtaszek said. "Transparency is required and demanded by our constituents, and we are confident that we will prevail in this matter."

The next hearing on the lawsuit against the Bridge Commission is set for Jan. 13 in federal court.

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