

# Kingsbury starting fund to pay colleagues' legal bills

By BRAD REAUME  
The Champion

Trustees facing conflict of interest charges will benefit from a legal defence fund set up by one of their own.

Tim Kingsbury, a Milton trustee for the Halton Board of Education, has started a fund to help pay the legal bills of five colleagues charged with breaching conflict of interest rules and voting on a budget in which they had a personal interest. Mr. Kingsbury contributed \$500 and will cover any ongoing bank administration costs for the fund.

Currently the board has no mechanism to cover legal bills incurred by public officials when they are charged for action taken while conducting their duties. Some municipalities, including Halton Region, have this type of protection in place.

"Once the case is dealt with I will be bringing forward a motion for the board to pay for their legal defence," said Mr. Kingsbury. "In the event this passes, any contributions (to the new fund) will be paid back."

Mr. Kingsbury said the cost for the trustees defence has exceeded \$20,000 and the case is still several months from the courtroom. Charged are Milton's Flo Belford, Ethel Gardiner of Halton Hills, Burlington trustees Linda Glover and Joe Pavelka and Penny Siebert of Oakville.

Mr. Kingsbury said he is convinced the trustees will be exonerated. If the charges were to be upheld, he contended it would have far-reaching consequences for most elected officials in Ontario.

Mr. Kingsbury said he has not thought in terms of the trustees' legal bills being paid for by the board if

they are found guilty, but he stressed some formal policy should be in place for similar legal challenges in the future.

Conflict of interest rules make it difficult for both sides in these disputes said Frank Gue, president of the Burlington Taxpayers Coalition. That is the group which has launched the legal challenge. His organization has started fundraising to pay its legal bills. Mr. Gue had no difficulty with Mr. Kingsbury setting up a similar fund for the trustees.

"Good for him. He's putting his money where his mouth is," said Mr. Gue. But Mr. Gue viewed Mr. Kingsbury's move to have the board pick up trustees' legal expenses after the hearing as improper.

Mr. Gue agreed that, without a screening mechanism, frivolous charges could be brought against public officials with some regularity.

"I want to make it clear we are not saying the trustees are bad people, they are community minded," Mr. Gue said. "However, on this issue we feel one way and they feel another."



Tim Kingsbury

Mr. Kingsbury said he was concerned that the mounting legal costs could force some trustees to quit, a situation which could lead to effective control of public officials through the Conflict of Interest Act.

He will accept donations to the defence fund by way of a cheque made out to Tim Kingsbury — In Trust. Cheques should be sent to Mr. Kingsbury at RR #1 Campbellville, Ontario L0P 1B0.

Mr. Kingsbury acknowledged that a board motion to reimburse the trustees for legal costs could become a political hot potato, especially considering the fact that it would likely be improper for those trustees who are affected to vote on the issue.

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