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What local lawmakers are saying about Laverriere

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LAWRENCE — Local lawmakers who help deliver state grant money to the region are saying they are outraged the head of the city's leading anti-poverty agency was found by The Eagle-Tribune to be at the Elks Club as much as he was in the office.

"This is just one more example of the bureaucracy that's bleeding taxpayers," said Rep. Paul Adams, an Andover Republican who represents Lawrence.

Adams is calling for the immediate dismissal of Philip F. Laverriere Sr. as executive director of the Greater Lawrence Community Action Council. Laverriere, 85, has headed the agency since 1974 and oversees 310 employees and a budget of \$30 million — \$29 million of which comes from state and federal tax dollars. He took home a paycheck last year of almost \$145,000.

The agency assists as many as 35,000 of the area's neediest residents with heat subsidies, child care, immigration assistance and other services.

"He has broken the public trust," Adams said. "We have poverty stricken families on waiting lists and he's playing video poker."

State Rep. Linda Dean Campbell, D-Methuen, says Laverriere needs to be "removed immediately" and that she has "serious concerns" the 21-member board of directors that oversees the GLCAC was unaware Laverriere was spending so much time away from work.

"People are really, really struggling and it's very saddening and very frustrating that this would happen at anytime," Campbell said.

Lawrence Mayor William Lantigua has already called for Laverriere to be fired along with the agency's assistant executive director Charles "Chick" LoPiano. He has also asked for Thomas Schiavone, president of the agency's board of directors, to go.

State Sen. Barry Finegold said "change needs to happen throughout the whole organization. I think we need new blood and people committed to the agency's mission."

Finegold, D-Andover, said the "whole management team needs to be questioned as to whether they are the best people to move the organization forward."

State Rep. David Torrisi, D-North Andover, said it is critical for the GLCAC board to make changes.

"There's a process that needs to be followed," Torrisi said. He said he spoke with Schiavone and was confident the matter would be handled in an "open and transparent matter and they will take the appropriate steps."

"We have to make sure we don't compound this problem by having a knee-jerk reaction," Torrisi said.

Rep. Marcos Devers, D-Lawrence, said he thinks the situation merits an investigation and called on state and federal officials "to do what's appropriate."

"Obviously what he is doing is not right," Devers said of Laverriere.

State Rep. James Lyons, R-Andover, said this scenario speaks to the larger issue of accountability to taxpayers, but that it shouldn't cheapen or damage other non-profit agencies that provide "terrific services to people in need."

"We don't want to lump everyone into one big pot," Lyons said.

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