

Burlington County Times

Senate Judiciary Committee opts not to consider controversial Pinelands nomination

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Senate President Stephen Sweeney, D-3rd of West Deptford, said the Senate Judiciary Committee refrained from considering Ed McGlinchey's nomination to one of the commission's seven gubernatorial appointee seats because of the committee's lengthy agenda, which included dozens of nominations to the Superior Court bench, as well as various state and county boards and authorities.

TRENTON — The New Jersey Senate confirmed two Burlington County attorneys to become Superior Court judges Thursday, but lawmakers held off on a controversial nomination to the Pinelands Commission amid opposition from several environmental groups.

The Senate Judiciary Committee refrained from considering Ed McGlinchey's nomination to one of the commission's seven gubernatorial appointee seats because of the committee's lengthy agenda, which included dozens of nominations to the Superior Court bench, as well as various state and county boards and authorities, according to Senate President Stephen Sweeney, D-3rd of West Deptford.

Among the nominations the committee advanced were the appointments of Lisa A. Puglisi, of Burlington Township, and James J. Ferrelli, of Mount Laurel, to become Superior Court judges.

“We had a lot on the agenda today,” Sweeney said in response to questions about McGlinchey’s nomination, adding that the committee might consider it at a later date during the Legislature’s ongoing lame-duck session.

He also acknowledged intense “interest” from environmental groups about the appointment, although that was less of a factor in the decision to not consider the nomination on Thursday.

“I know there’s interest in it. We’ve been through that before. But there was just too much of a packed agenda,” Sweeney said.

The decision was cheered by environmental groups that had launched a lobbying campaign against the nomination after Gov. Chris Christie’s office announced it late Monday afternoon.

The nomination was considered unusual because it called for McGlinchey to move from his seat as Camden County’s appointed representative on the Pinelands panel to fellow Commissioner Ed Lloyd’s seat as one of the seven gubernatorial appointees.

The 15-member commission is charged with overseeing development and land use within the million-acre Pinelands reserve. Seven of the commissioners are gubernatorial appointments that must be approved by the Senate. The other seats include appointees of the seven counties that encompass the Pinelands and one appointee by the U.S. secretary of the Interior.

Environmental leaders expressed outrage about the idea of replacing Lloyd, arguing that the longtime environmental attorney is one of the commission’s most experienced members and one of its strongest conservationists. They also cited McGlinchey’s recent record of voting in favor of two controversial natural gas pipelines slated to run through portions of the Pinelands, one in Cape May and Cumberland counties and the other in parts of Burlington, Monmouth and Ocean counties.

As part of their opposition, supporters from groups such as the Pinelands Preservation Alliance, Food and Water Watch, Environment New Jersey and New Jersey Sierra Club flooded senators’ offices with phone calls and emails

opposing the proposed change to the commission. Volunteers and leaders also lined the hallway outside the Statehouse hearing room where the Judiciary Committee was meeting in order to press senators in person.

Sweeney said that he still supports McGlinchey's appointment, but that it was possible his nomination could be changed so that a different sitting commissioner is targeted rather than Lloyd.

"It's an open question," he said.

Sen. Paul Sarlo, D-36th of Wood-Ridge, said there was no support for replacing Lloyd.

"I'll go on record: There's no votes," Sarlo said.

He also tweeted an announcement that the nomination to replace Lloyd would not be considered.

"To those that called our offices and expressed their concerns, I thank you for your input," Sarlo said in his post. "Please be advised that Ed Lloyd will remain as a capable and qualified member."

Environmental leaders weren't ready to declare victory, but they were encouraged that the nomination was not advanced.

"Ed McGlinchey's nomination being held today was a victory for the Pinelands and the public outcry. However, it's just round one in a multi-round battle that is going to continue. Even though McGlinchey was held today, it doesn't mean they're not going to bring him back next week," said Jeff Tittel, director of the New Jersey Sierra Club. "We have to keep fighting and pushing to make sure his nomination is held and that Ed Lloyd is allowed to stay on the commission."

Jaclyn Rhoads, assistant director of the Pinelands Preservation Alliance, said the group would oppose any change to the Pinelands Commission during the lame duck, regardless of which seat is targeted.

“Obviously, Ed Lloyd is a fantastic commissioner and he should be respected. But regardless of who they pick, it still creates the same conditions,” Rhoads said, adding that any nominations should wait until after Gov. Phil Murphy is sworn into office.

Lawmakers should also expect to continue to hear from volunteers concerned about the proposed change in the commission’s makeup.

“We’re going to keep fighting,” Rhoads said. “They can expect people to still make those (phone) calls, and we’ll be there during the remaining days of the lame duck. They’ll have to face us, and hopefully they’ll make the right decision.”

Puglisi and Ferrelli’s judicial appointments sailed through the Judiciary Committee, and both were confirmed by the full Senate during its voting session Thursday afternoon.

Puglisi has served as Christie’s deputy chief counsel since March. She also previously worked as the governor’s assistant appointments counsel, director of the Governor’s Task Force for Recidivism Reduction, and as an assistant attorney general in the Division of Law.

Ferrelli most recently was a partner at the Cherry Hill firm of Duane Morris, where he specialized in business litigation.

He is the son of the late Judge Dominick Ferrelli, who spent 16 years on the Superior Court bench in Burlington County and was also the county’s first full-time prosecutor.

“He was and will always be my greatest role model in life, as a man and as a lawyer,” Ferrelli said Thursday during his hearing. “I can tell you if I were fortunate enough to be confirmed and sworn in as a Superior Court judge, that I’m going to do everything I can to serve the people of New Jersey with distinction, with humility, with compassion, and with faithful adherence to the constitution and laws of the state of New Jersey and the United States of America.”



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