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Stanalonis accuses Densford camp of role in filing grievance complaint

By John Wharton, Staff Writer

Complaints against lawyers filed with a state commission generally remain confidential unless action is taken before the state's highest court, but a grievance against St. Mary's judicial candidate Joseph M. Stanalonis literally took center stage Tuesday night at a political forum.

Stanalonis accused his opponent in the Nov. 6 election, Judge David W. Densford, during the forum of taking part in pursuing the complaint against him that he said amounted to an attack on his license to practice law. Stanalonis, an assistant county prosecutor, later said at his office that he views the complaint as a desperate campaign tactic, and predicted that it ultimately will be dismissed after the election.

During Tuesday's forum, Densford, appointed circuit court judge late last year, insisted that neither he nor his campaign had anything to do with the complaint.

The question about the complaint filed against Stanalonis through the Maryland Attorney Grievance Commission was presented on one of the index cards gathered by members of the St. Mary's League of Women Voters from the forum's audience at Great Mills High School.

In August, Stanalonis' campaign activities were rebuked by the Maryland Judicial Campaign Conduct Committee. The committee criticized Stanalonis in part for comments in a flier about Densford's handling of criminals as a judge, his stance on circuit court judicial elections and his position on putting convicted sex offenders on a state registry. The committee report stated that Densford had not been on the bench long enough at that time to sentence any criminals, that the flier tried to mislead voters about his take on judicial elections and that his arguments on behalf of clients facing inclusion on the registry did not mean he was opposed to the registry's existence.

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Stanalonis said Tuesday night that the complaint with the grievance commission was the first one filed against him during his 17 years as a lawyer, and that it arose from the campaign flier that he maintains was truthful in its content, and from a newspaper article about the committee's report that appeared in the Maryland Daily Record.

"The complaint was not signed," Stanalonis said at the forum. "It appears to have been filed by my opponent's campaign."

Densford responded, "I knew nothing about it. I did not file that, and my campaign did not file it."

Stanalonis said, "I think it's a ludicrous reason to file a complaint in an election." He later told the audience, "I

believe the filing of the grievance was malicious and was an attack on my law license."

On Thursday at his office in the county courthouse, Stanalonis said the attorney grievance commission sent him a letter asking him to respond to the flier and newspaper article attached to the letter. "They don't say what's wrong with" the flier, Stanalonis said. "This grievance is essentially an anonymous complaint, and it's being filed by someone who is a coward. And they're filing it anonymously because it is a lie."

Stanalonis said the attorney grievance commission is not supposed to accept anonymous complaints and he doesn't know who filed this one, but the prosecutor noted that George E. Meng, a Calvert County lawyer who filed last summer's complaint with the judicial campaign conduct committee, is a member of the attorney grievance commission.

"Meng seems to be the common denominator," Stanalonis said, adding that the new complaint "was self-generated by the commission, or they accepted an anonymous complaint."

Meng said Thursday from his law office that he has not filed a complaint to the commission, on which he serves as one of its nine lawyers, and that only a complainant, the attorney targeted in the complaint and bar counsel should know about an initial filing.

"I don't know that there's been a complaint to the attorney general commission," Meng said. "The reality is we don't actually see complaints until they get to a certain level."

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