**County won’t help with defense**

**Rockingham County attorney rebuffed:**

Patricia Conway faces a possible whistleblower lawsuit.

Union Leader Correspondent

whistleblower lawsuit.

The decision comes in the wake of Conway firing a key witness in the state investigation into former county attorney James Reams. Conway terminated Jerome Blanchard on Nov. 7, hours after she was sworn into office.

“The board of commissioners is not going to make a comment on this case, and we’re not going to in the near future,” board Chairman Tom Tombarello said immediately after the 3-0 vote.

Commissioners learned earlier this month that Rockingham County could face a potential whistleblower lawsuit from Blanchard. The lawsuit would name Conway personally. She had asked commissioners to indemnify her and pay for her defense.

Conway was present at Wednesday’s meeting of Rockingham County Commissioners to hear the decision, but did not immediately

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PATRICIA CONWAY

...facing possible suit

By JAMES A. KIMBLE

County commissioners unanimously voted against paying for the legal defense of Rockingham County Attorney Patricia Conway in a potential

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Whistleblower
comment.

She is expected to appeal the decision to the Rockingham County delegation, a 90-member panel of state representatives. Conway has repeatedly said that Blanchard's firing was not retaliation, and she could not elaborate publicly on a reason for the termination.

The firing followed months of turmoil caused by a state investigation that probed allegations of sexual harassment by Reams, along with alleged ethical issues and mismanagement of a forfeiture account.

Reams denied any wrongdoing and left office last June after a court battle he took up against the state briefly returned him to elected office.

The appeal process that Conway is expected to tap comes from a state law (RSA 29-A:7) which allows a county officer or official to bring a petition "to the county convention."

But it remains unclear whether the entire 90-member delegation will eventually hear the appeal, as Rockingham County begins wading into largely uncharted territory.

Rep. Norm Major, RPlaistow, chairman of the delegation, said in a recent interview that an appeal like Conway's would likely be heard by a three-member personnel committee. Major, who sits on that subcommittee, said the panel uses a format similar to a judicial proceeding, in which live witnesses testify for the various parties.

Commissioners met with their lawyer and Conway in a closed-door meeting last Wednesday to inquire about her reasoning for Blanchard’s firing. The week delay between the private meeting with Conway and the public vote happened because commissioners wanted to pose questions to the county’s insurance provider before reaching a decision.

Critics of Conway — which include commission Vice Chairman Kevin Coyle — have said that Blanchard’s firing was retaliation for his participation in the investigation into Reams.

Conway was drawn into the Reams probe after Blanchard reported to state investigators that her husband — a former Salem police sergeant — was improperly “cleared” from a state-mandated list of past and current law enforcement officers with potential credibility issues.

The state Attorney General’s Office, which led the Reams’ investigation, has released thousands of pages documenting the probe, but has not made public their interviews with Conway or her husband.

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