

**ST. MARY'S COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
ETHICS PANEL**

Complaints by: [REDACTED]

Recommended Opinions

Nos. 2024-01 and 2024-02 (Consolidated)

RECOMMENDED OPINION

BACKGROUND

On July 18, 2024, a quorum of the St. Mary's County Public Schools (SMCPS) Ethics Panel ("Panel") met in Executive Session to consider an ethics complaint filed by [REDACTED] on June 11, 2024. Subsequent to that meeting, the Ethics Panel received a similar complaint from [REDACTED] et al. on August 2, 2024. The complaints allege Board Member Mrs. Dorothy Andrews violated SMCPS' Ethics Policy BCA and Regulation BCA-R when she wore a "TRUMP" pin during the Great Mills High School graduation ceremony and engaged in other partisan behaviors noted in the complaint(s).

As Ethics Regulation BCA-R states "The Ethics Panel shall utilize outside legal counsel if a current or former Board member or Superintendent is the subject of, or files the Complaint.", the Panel retained the law firm of Jackson Lewis in September 2024. At the direction of the Ethics Panel, the complaints were consolidated for investigation.

FINDINGS OF OUTSIDE COUNSEL

Counsel at Jackson Lewis made the following factual findings:

1. Mrs. Andrews engaged in partisan speech, in her official Board member capacity, by wearing a "TRUMP" pin during the Great Mills High School graduation ceremony in violation of SMCPS Policy BC.
2. Mrs. Andrews made religious and partisan statements, in her official Board member capacity, during the May 10, 2023 BOE meeting, which did not violate any SMCPS policy.
3. Mrs. Andrews engaged in partisan speech, in her personal capacity, by making political posts on her Public Facebook account, which did not violate any SMCPS policy.

4. Mrs. Andrews engaged in partisan activity, in her personal capacity, by campaigning for BOE candidates on May 14, 2024, at the Mechanicsville Volunteer Fire Department, which did not violate any SMCPs Policy.

Although Jackson Lewis concluded that Mrs. Andrews violated Policy BC when she displayed the "TRUMP" pin, they found the Panel does not have jurisdiction to take any action against Mrs. Andrews as to that violation because it does not constitute or otherwise relate to any violation under the Ethics Policy and/or Regulations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel submits Jackson Lewis' finding that the Board issue a written notice to Mrs. Andrews regarding the violation of Policy BC and its expectation that Mrs. Andrews adhere to Policy BC going forward. Additionally, the Panel submits Jackson Lewis' recommendation that current Board members receive training on SMCPs Policies and Ethics Policies/Regulations relating to political and religious activities, and also implement similar training for the onboarding of newly elected Board members.

1/30/25
Date

Robert Ertter
Robert Ertter, Chair

Christine McDonough
Christine McDonough, Vice Chair

Roy H. Alvey
Roy Alvey

Katie Hill
Katie Hill

John A. Walters
John Walters