

## Coalition calling for Pompelio reinstatement to victims board

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By JOHN BRAND

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A coalition of victim-sensitive individuals and organizations throughout the state and an assemblyman are calling for the reinstatement of Richard Pompelio to head the Victims of Crime Compensation Board.

The New Jersey Coalition of Crime Victims criticized Gov. James E. McGreevey's decision last month to remove Pompelio, who was appointed chairman of the VCCB in January, and replace him with former VCCB Chairman Jacob C. Toporek.

In an e-mail sent to the media, Kathleen M. Garcia, chairperson of the coalition, accused McGreevey of letting political party affiliation prevent Pompelio from heading the VCCB.

"If you lost a loved one on Sept. 11th, or at any point, due to a horrible act of violence, we doubt you would care at all if the person responsible for assisting you were a Democrat, or a Republican," she said.

What would matter, Garcia said, is if the person was willing to do "whatever was humanly possible to help you and your family after such a tragic event."

Assemblyman Kevin O'Toole, R-21, has also expressed his opposition of McGreevey's decision.

"Crime victims need to know that there is someone who they can trust looking out for their interests," O'Toole said. "They had that with Richard Pompelio. I don't think they will have that feeling with Mr. Toporek."

Garcia mentioned a quote given by McGreevey to the New York Times: "I am among the least partisan individuals ... I look forward to working on a bipartisan basis.' This is the perfect opportunity for Gov. McGreevey to prove the sincerity in his words with his actions by removing Jacob Toporek, Democrat, and reinstating Richard Pompelio, a Republican."

The coalition and Pompelio worked together in 1989-1990 to pass the state's first Constitutional Amendment in the area of human rights.

On Nov. 5, 1991 the New Jersey Victims Rights Amendment was passed and stated, "A victim of crime shall be treated with fairness, compassion and respect by the criminal justice system," according to the New Jersey Victims Law Center Web site.

"We intend to make enough noise and if nothing else we will make it really uncomfortable for some people," Garcia said Wednesday. "We're going to keep pushing like we did with the amendment."

Pompelio was reached by telephone Wednesday night but declined to comment on the support he is receiving.

McGreevey replaced Pompelio with Toporek, who served as board chairman from 1990-95, in mid-February. During his previous tenure, Toporek ignored allegations of sexual harassment against a female employee, findings which were substantiated by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the Attorney General's Office.

O'Toole, who worked with Pompelio on the Domestic Violence Task Force, described Pompelio as a "class act who is devoted to looking out for the interests of crime victims. "To replace him as chairman with someone who sat by and did little if anything to stop

abuse in his own office is unacceptable,” O’Toole said.

Pompelio, a Sparta resident, is the founder of the New Jersey Crime Victim’s Law Center, which provided free legal services to crime victims since the murder of his son, Tony, in 1989, according to Garcia.

When Pompelio was appointed in January by former acting Gov. Donald DiFrancesco “victims and advocates state-wide were elated,” said Garcia.