

Riiska certifies petition

By JUNE PETERSON
Register Citizen Staff

1-20-94

WINSTED — Town Clerk William T. Riiska certified a 1991 petition Tuesday afternoon, averting a lawsuit.

Former Selectman Walter D. Miller had threatened to sue the town unless Riiska certified the 360-signature petition.

The petition called for a town meeting on a June 1991 vote by the Board of Selectmen that granted retiring police captain Francis J. O'Neill a \$10,000 supplementary retirement benefit. Riiska, acting on the advice of town attorney Stephen O. Allaire, did not certify the petition.

"What I did was not wrong; it was the proper thing," Riiska said Wednesday. He said he only certified the petition Wednesday to give it to selectmen and "get it off my back."

The Board of Selectmen Tuesday unanimously voted to refer the petition to Town Attorney Kevin F. Nelligan.

Riiska's earlier failure to certify the petition had resulted in the Superior Court's dismissal of a lawsuit against the town over the payout. Community lawyer Charlene LaVoie filed a lawsuit against the town over the benefit on the behalf of resident Patricia Mills.

"The reason (Riiska) gave is curious because it's really not a reason," LaVoie said Wednesday. "He did not indicate that he understood it was the proper thing to do under the charter and it was his duty to do so. Rather, he was indicating he feels for him it's a way out of the matter. If that's the only lesson the town officials have learned from it, then that's unfortunate."

Mills said her case was never heard before the courts because of the technicality that Riiska never certified the petition. She accused Riiska of dereliction of duty. Riiska's role in handling petitions is clearly defined by town charter.

"I think it's a sad state of affairs that citi-