

Petitioning banned from post office

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LaVoie wrote in her letter.

"The Supreme Court of the United States has made it clear that municipal sidewalks are a quidproquotal public forum where expression cannot be denied. Therefore, any prohibition of petition activities on the public passageway in front of the Winsted Post Office is unconstitutional."

LaVoie wrote to St. Pierre. "In addition, attempt to prohibit this type of activity reflects a lack of awareness of the traditional and important role of the post office in Winsted as a place for the communication of thoughts between citizens and the discussion of public questions."

St. Pierre was reluctant to

comment Tuesday. He said he had responded to LaVoie's letter; though LaVoie said she had not received his response as of Tuesday afternoon.

Certain activities are prohibited, and a fine line exists between what can and cannot be done on postal property, St. Pierre said.

Petitioners cannot obstruct customers from entering the post office, he said. People cannot sell things there, he said. Also, political activities are forbidden, he said.

But those items are not the issue, LaVoie said.

"We are not discussing the myriad of activities that might take place in and around the post office," LaVoie said Tuesday. "We're talking about a very specific constitutional function —

freedom of expression on the municipal sidewalk."

Martin Margulies, a volunteer attorney for the Connecticut Civil Liberties Union and a constitutional law teacher at Quinnipiac Law School, agreed with LaVoie. In this case, the sidewalk is "absolutely a quintessential public forum," because it appears to front on a public sidewalk, he said.

Margulies, who argued the Frank Longo case, said Pavlek's complaint differs. Longo, a former Bristol mayor who died last week, was arrested in 1981 for

collecting petition signatures on a walkway outside the Torrington post office. Longo was seeking signatures to get his name on a ballot for the U.S. Senate. Longo's challenge of the ban on political campaigning on federal property was denied by the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Manhattan. The Torrington walkway was an interior walk, distinguishing Longo's claim from the Winsted situation.

The appeals court ruling stated the sidewalk between a post office and its parking lot is not a public forum.