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Committee dismisses ex-mayor's complaint against Winsted lawyer

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WINSTED — The Statewide Grievance Committee has dismissed a complaint against community lawyer Charlene LaVoie, confirming an earlier panel's ruling that she did not violate professional standards.

The grievance committee on Thursday dismissed former Mayor William M. McCabe's complaint that LaVoie violated the Rules of Professional Conduct for lawyers in connection with a 1991 lawsuit against the town.

LaVoie, in a written statement, said she views the decision as "not only a victory for the citizens of Winsted, but all citizens of Connecticut."

The complaint stems from LaVoie's challenge of a board of selectmen's decision to pay a supplemental retirement benefit to a police officer.

McCabe said LaVoie violated ethical standards when she contacted John F. Gauger, a selectman who is now the town's mayor, without notifying the town's lawyer.

LaVoie believes she was exercising her right to free speech as guaranteed by the First Amendment. But McCabe dismissed the constitutional issues as a red herring.

McCabe said he takes comfort in an earlier decision issued by the grievance committee's reviewing panel. Although two members of the panel voted that LaVoie did not commit an ethical misstep, one dissented, saying that there was "no compelling First Amendment concern."