



briefs



Karen Christiansen

Christiansen convicted of four felonies

Former BHUSD Facilities Director Karen Christiansen was convicted Monday afternoon in Los Angeles Superior Court of all four felony counts of conflict of interest related to her work in Beverly Hills. One of the counts was enhanced based on the allegation that Christiansen's company Strategic Concepts drew more than \$1.3 million in payments from the BHUSD's Measure E bond fund.

The enhancement makes Christiansen eligible for an additional three years in prison, if she is sentenced to prison, and it also increased the amount of Christiansen's bail, Los Angeles County Deputy District Attorney Max Huntsman said.

Following her conviction, Christiansen was taken into custody and bail was set at \$400,000. She is scheduled to appear for sentencing at the Clara Shortridge Foltz Criminal Justice Center on Jan. 5.

"Three counts had to do with the defendant participating in the awarding of contracts to Johnson Controls while she was on the side doing consulting work for them and submitting them invoices to pay her," Huntsman said. "That was the first three counts that ultimately resulted in a \$7.5 million contract for Johnson Controls."

The BHUSD recently came to a settlement agreement with Johnson Controls Inc. in which the company agreed to pay the district \$5 million plus \$1.65 million in equipment credit from the company. The settlement came as a result of claims the district filed related to the company's relationship with Christiansen and "certain representations made in the energy agreements," according to a copy of the settlement.

The fourth count, Huntsman said, was related to Christiansen's participation in encouraging the BHUSD's \$334 million bond, Measure E, from which her company, Strategic Concepts, ended up benefiting financially.

"That was the last charge and that had an excessive taking allegation, meaning when you commit a white collar crime or a bank robbery for that matter, if you take a lot of money, the sentence is more severe," Huntsman said. "In this case, because she took more than \$1.3 million, she could serve an additional three years in prison. That's based on once this bond was approved, her company started submitting invoices and drawing money at a rate of about \$250,000 a month until she was fired in the summer of 2009."

Board of Education Vice President Brian Goldberg said Tuesday he was gratified by

the verdict.

"I'm hopeful that it sends the right message to anybody planning on working with the district that we will not stand for being taken advantage of in any way, shape or form," Goldberg said.

Including the enhancement, Christiansen faces a maximum of eight years in prison.

"She's probably looking at a midterm of 2 years plus enhancement of 3 years, but the judge has the discretion to strike the enhancement," said attorney Ronald Richards, who was not involved in the case.

Richards said he thought it was likely Christiansen would receive prison time.

"[Christiansen] has no prior record. She's eligible for probation, but I think in a case like this where you have someone working for a public agency, I don't think they're going to strike the enhancement or give her probation," Richards said. "On a loss amount that large, I see them sending her to prison."

At Christiansen's sentencing, Richards said Christiansen's attorneys could argue her lack of a prior record, or the uncommon nature of the offense and that it is unlikely be repeated.

"It was obvious from the beginning that you can't approve a contract that benefits yourself when you're working for the public," Richards said. "It had conflict of interest written all over it, so for something like this to become criminal, it was a pretty obvious breach of her ethics."

Former BHUSD Superintendent Jeffrey Hubbard, who is accused of three counts of misappropriation of public funds, is scheduled to appear in Los Angeles Superior Court on

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SNAPSHOT



Photo credit: Judie Fenton

CHIEF IN TRAINING ROXBURY DRIVE

Councilmember John Mirisch's son Vincent Mirisch mans the ticket table at the annual Thanksgiving Luncheon at Roxbury Park Community Center this past Monday. Each year, the Beverly Hills Firemen's Association sponsors and serves lunch to Beverly Hills senior citizens.

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