

Councilman sues, charging defamation

By Jeff Shields

INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Republican City Councilman Jack Kelly is suing a Lawncrest man for a smear campaign that Kelly says nearly cost him last year's general election.

Kelly has sued Paul D. Corbett and Corbett's loosely-assembled group, Citizens Opposed to Politicians Who Pander to Perverts, for defamation. Kelly filed suit last month in Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas, asking at least \$50,000 in damages.

Kelly, who is paying his own legal fees in the case, argues that fellow Republican Corbett and other members of COPPP "publicly and privately embarrassed and shamed" him by distributing fliers in church parking lots in the weeks before the November election.

The fliers announced that "Councilman Kelly voted with the homosexual lobby to remove the Boy Scouts from their city rent-free headquarters. The Scouts can remain only if they agree with the homosexual agenda which would promote sodomy to our youth."

Kelly was one of 16 Council members who voted in May 2007 to break the \$1-a-year lease with the Cradle of Liberty Council, Philadelphia's Boy Scouts of America chapter. The vote came after the Law Department asserted that the city could not subsidize a private organization that discriminated against gays. The city subsequently upped the rent to \$200,000 annually.

The Boy Scouts remain in the building. The city is trying to enforce the terms of the new lease in state court, while the Scouts have filed a federal civil rights lawsuit. Both are pending.

Kelly, an incumbent, edged out Republican David Oh for the final at-large seat on Council by just 123 votes. Kelly was not declared a winner until two weeks after the election as both sides argued over absentee ballots.

"Kelly nearly lost the election and was forced to spend tens of thousand of dollars in legal fees, consultants, and advertising to maintain his City Council seat since the election results were so close," wrote Kelly's attorneys, George Bochetto and Scott Sigman.

Kelly's acting chief of staff, John Cerrone, said, Corbett defamed Kelly. "The Councilman absolutely will not tolerate Mr. Corbett's or anyone else's nefarious and downright vitriolic actions, now or in the future," Cerrone said.

Corbett, 79, was unperturbed yesterday. He accused Kelly of "whining."

"If the electorate is informed of the homosexual agenda, they will vote against it," Corbett said, "and the distribution of the few thousand fliers we put out proved it. Someone had to do it, and I'm proud that I led the effort."

Kelly and city officials have said that Corbett should have registered COPPP as a political committee if it funded political activities. Kelly referred the case to the District Attorney Lynne Abraham, Cerrone said. Corbett said he saw no reason to register COPPP. "This is a moral and religious battle more than a political one," he said.

Contact staff writer Jeff Shields at 215-854-4565 or jshields@phillynews.com.