

New Haven Register

Serving New Haven, CT

[News](#) > [New Haven](#)

Kerekes says DeStefano responsible for firefighter discrimination settlement (video)

Published: Tuesday, October 11, 2011



By Abbe Smith, Register Staff
asmith@nhregister.com / Twitter: [@abbegsmith](https://twitter.com/abbegsmith)

NEW HAVEN — In an increasingly heated race for the city's top office, independent Democrat Jeffrey Kerekes attacked Mayor John DeStefano Jr. Tuesday, arguing DeStefano should be held responsible for the \$5 million Ricci discrimination settlement.

Kerekes accused DeStefano of "sabotaging" the 2004 firefighter certification exams and thereby triggering the now-infamous lawsuit that went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court and ended with a decision against the city. He argued DeStefano should be held personally responsible for the damages awarded to the 20 firefighters in the case.

Kerekes also accused DeStefano of transferring assets to protect himself from a possible judgment in the Ricci case. Land records show DeStefano transferred ownership of his home and a rental property to his wife, Katherine DeStefano, in 2008, after the firefighters vowed to take their lawsuit to the Supreme Court.

"This seems to be a premeditated way of making sure the taxpayers get stuck with the bill," Kerekes said Tuesday in front of Stetson Library on Dixwell Avenue.

The settlement granted the firefighters \$2 million in damages and \$3 million in attorney fees. Last month, the Board of Aldermen approved a resolution that gives the city the option to use tax-exempt bond financing to pay for the settlement.

Kerekes sent a letter to state Attorney General George Jepsen Tuesday asking him to investigate the matter. By the afternoon, Jepsen released a statement saying he will not investigate.

"My office is not authorized to oversee the manner that municipalities handle litigation and settlements in cases against them," he said. "Nor are we authorized to review municipal decisions regarding indemnification of local government officials and employees."

DeStefano had strong words in response to Kerekes' charges, which he called "despicable."

"My opponent can't confidently talk about how to create jobs, how he will educate our kids or how he will help keep the city safe, so he's going to attack me personally and now my wife," he said. "He can say whatever he wants to say about me, but he ought to mind his own business about my wife. If he's going to make that kind of statement, make it to my face."

Kerekes charges that DeStefano did not act in the best interest of the city regarding the rejection of promotional exams and the resulting lawsuit. He alleges that DeStefano was motivated at the time by a desire to protect his relationship with the Rev. Boise Kimber, an influential figure in the black community.

Kerekes quoted language in Justice Samuel Alito's concurring opinion in the Supreme Court case, which says that Kimber could have influenced the decision to throw out the exam results.

"Even the District Court admitted that 'a jury could rationally infer that city officials worked behind the scenes to sabotage the promotional examinations because they knew that, were the exams certified, the Mayor would incur the wrath of Kimber and other influential leaders of New Haven's African-American community,'" Alito wrote.

Kimber declined to comment Tuesday.

In her dissenting opinion, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg pointed out that the decision against certification of the exams was not made by Kimber or DeStefano.

"There is scant cause to suspect that maneuvering or overheated rhetoric, from either side, prevented the (Civil Service Board) from evenhandedly assessing the reliability of the exams and rendering an independent, good-faith decision on certification," Ginsburg wrote.

Danny Kedem, spokesman for the Destefano campaign, called Kerekes' attacks "sad."

"Mr. Kerekes isn't talking about education, he isn't taking creating jobs, and he isn't talking about keeping our families safe," he said.

Regarding DeStefano's decision to transfer ownership of his home to his wife in 2008, Kedem said: "The mayor and his family are going to make private financial decisions that make the most sense for them."

Kerekes said he is disappointed Jepsen is not investigating the case, but he stands by his argument that New Haven taxpayers should not be made to pay for the city's mistakes.

"State law generally says that political leaders can be held indemnified by their taxpayers except in cases of egregious self-interest at taxpayer expense. The Ricci case could very well be one of those," he said.

Call Abbe Smith at 203-789-5615. To receive breaking news first, text the word nhnews to 22700. Standard msg+data rates may apply.

- [Return to Paging Mode](#)



Reader Comments »

[View reader comments \(0\)](#) » [Comment on this story](#) »

 Recommend

 Sign Up to see what your friends recommend.

 share



 ShareThis

TALK OF THE WEB

No Tweets...yet.
Please feel free to share your thoughts about this article at www.twitter.com

RECOMMENDED FOR YOU

- ▶ **Stock Market Story: Oct. 11**
- ▶ **Occupy Wall Street Draws Star Supporters**
- ▶ **Komisarjevsky bombshell: Steven Hayes says in...**
- ▶ **2 dogs killed, resident sent to hospital in...**
- ▶ **2 arrested in alleged plot to kill U.S...**
- ▶ **Man hits tree in one-car crash**

-- SPONSORED LINK --

In Rwanda, architecture that empowers and heals
(From DailyMe.com)



FACTCHECK Missing or inaccurate information in this story? Tell us.

Tell us what was wrong



Tirw Tech.

TOWN FAIR TIRE of AVON is now acc...

MECHANIC

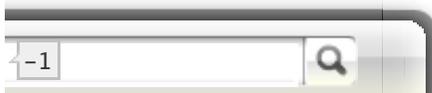
Trucks and heavy equipment, experie...

Part Time Confidential Financial Administrat Assistant

A/R, A/P, phones, filing, general o...

[View More](#)

[Place a Classified](#)



[▲ Back to Top](#)