

SEPTA adds lawyer for probe

Ex-deputy solicitor names to 130G post



By Chris Brennan

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SEPTA has added another layer to the level of bureaucracy put in place in the last month to investigate the agency's staggering legal problems.

James B. Jordan, a former deputy city solicitor and former integrity and accountability officer for the Philadelphia Police Department, joins the ranks of politically high-powered lawyers being paid by SEPTA to repair those legal problems.

Jordan's title, assistant general manager of loss prevention, risk and claims management, comes with a \$130,000 annual paycheck.

SEPTA general manager Jack Leary appointed Jordan to the post last Friday, without a vote from the agency's 15-member board of directors.

"I don't think it's required by the board to give any formal approval," SEPTA spokesman Richard Maloney said yesterday. "That's at the discretion of the general manager. Obviously, the board has been briefed."

SEPTA was rocked last month by a \$51 million jury verdict for a personal-injury lawsuit brought against them by a mother whose son's foot was cut off by a Broad Street Subway escalator in 1996.

That verdict was followed by a \$1 million contempt of court fine handed down by a judge who ruled SEPTA hid key documents and memos from the boy's attorneys.

SEPTA is appealing the jury verdict, saying it could cost a fare increase or service cutback.

Jordan starts work today and will spend the next 120 days on the job looking at how SEPTA's legal and claims departments handle lawsuits, Maloney said.

"There's no doubt there were some failings in our process, between claims and legal," Maloney said. "His job is to identify those and make corrections."

Jordan will also act on any recommendations made by a "blue-ribbon panel" of attorneys hired by SEPTA to oversee the agency's internal investigation of the escalator case, Maloney said.

He will report to Leary.

Maloney called the new job permanent, but was not sure if the new post would remain on SEPTA's payroll if Jordan left the agency for any reason.

"I think it's too soon to say," Maloney said. We're awaiting the report from the blue-ribbon panel. Obviously, he'll have some dealings with them, but I don't know to what extent."

That panel includes former Temple Law School dean Carl E. Singley, former Chief Federal Judge Edward N. Cahn and former Superior Court Judge D. Donald Jamieson.

The panel, which met yesterday for the second time, hired former deputy mayor David L. Cohen last month as its attorney and spokesman.

Cohen said the panel, which is being assisted by six SEPTA board members worked yesterday to develop a plan of what tasks it should accomplish, whom it should interview, and how long it should take.

The group also discussed how much Cohen, Singley, Cahn and Jamieson will be paid.

"It will be a heavily discounted rate," said Cohen, who cut his fees from \$435 an hour to \$250 last summer when he worked as SEPTA's negotiator during a 40-strike.

"It hasn't been decided yet."

Cohen said the panel's final report would be open to the public, but he did not expect to have much more to say about the investigation until it is finished.

"We don't think that aids the process of the investigation."